

Warrior

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# Japanese Infantryman 1937–45

Sword of the Empire



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## Author's Note

A number of photographs used in this book predate the Greater East Asia War. These depict Japanese troops in garrison life and undertaking training. While the uniforms are different, the equipment, activities, and settings are for all practical purposes the same as would have been encountered in similar settings during the war. Publicity photographs, in this instance in the form of postcards (provided by Taki), were seldom released during the war. The majority of the illustrations reproduced in this title are courtesy of the US Marine Corps and Department of Defense.

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## Abbreviations

AT	antitank
HE	high explosive
HMG	heavy machine gun
LMG	light machine gun
NCO	non-commissioned officer
WP	white phosphorus

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# JAPANESE INFANTRYMAN 1937-45 SWORD OF THE EMPIRE

## INTRODUCTION

Every army in World War II possessed its own elite, unique, and curious units. Rangers, commandos, paratroopers, mountain troops, marines, and others fall into these categories along with the notorious, such as the *Waffen-SS*. No country, however, had an army that presented such an enigma and was as perplexing to Westerners as the Imperial Japanese Army (*Dai Nippon Teikoku Rikugun*, or simply *Kogun*). The army had borne this title since 1925 when it was changed from *Nihongun* or *Kokugun* – Japan's Army or the Nation's Army. This change had wide-ranging effects on the army's psychological and legal authority. Whatever it did, it now did for the Emperor.

Much is not understood of this army and much more is misinterpreted. It was extremely brutal to its enemies and the populaces of occupied areas. It was not much easier on itself. Dedicated to the Emperor, its soldiers of all ranks adhered to a stern code of honor requiring them to die for the glory of the Emperor and the Empire. It really was an army that would fight to the death.

The Japanese Army, while armed with relatively modern weapons, had only recently emerged from a medieval, feudal past where it fought with swords, spears, bows and arrows. It was never quite able to leave that past behind. Already immersed in a *de facto* war in China, Japan (*Nippon*) largely ignored its many shortcomings and embarked on a war of conquest against more industrially capable nations, firmly believing that a superior spirit would prevail over material resources. It would establish its place in the world by carving out the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (*Dai Toa Kyo-ei-Ken*). World War II, what Japan called the Greater East Asia War (*Dai Toa Senso Senkum*), did indeed change the map.

The author does not pretend to be able to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of the Japanese Army than any other writer. He will, however, provide a basic study of what makes the Japanese soldier (*hetai*) different and offer some explanations as to why.

Across the sea,  
Corpses in the water;  
Across the mountains,  
Corpses heaped upon the field;  
I shall die for the Emperor,  
I shall never look back.

A typical infantryman early in the Greater East Asia War. "Taro," the subject of our story, would have appeared very much like this young soldier (*hetai*). He wears standard Meiji Type 30 (1897) infantry equipment, the Type 98 (1938) uniform, and carries a 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) rifle.



It was the grim fatalism of the *Uni Yukaba* (*Across the Sea*) that conveyed to the conscript what was expected of him as he entered a strange new world. Japanese society was extremely class-oriented and the Imperial Army was no different, except that the division of classes was not related to what the soldier had experienced in his former life. A recruit, regardless of his previous station in the civilian world – whether an uneducated peasant from the rice paddies or a wealthy merchant's son – found himself to be the lowest of the low once he donned the Emperor's uniform. The classes superior to him were senior soldiers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and officers. Each subsequent rank was superior to the one below, not in the Western sense of customary military authority, but implying an ability to abuse inferior ranks in almost any manner. Such power acted as a means of defining and maintaining authority – total control through submission.

The China Incident (*Shina Jihen*), engineered by the Japanese to start a war with China, had begun on **July 7, 1937** with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in Shanghai. A *de facto* war had been ongoing since **1931** when Japan took control of Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchuko in **1932**. In **1938** the Soviets moved troops into Outer Mongolia in response to Japan's build-up in Manchuko. Border battles were fought with the Soviets in **1938–39**. A neutrality pact was instituted between Japan and the USSR in **1941**, but the Japanese continued to maintain significant forces in the form of the Kwantung Army defending Manchuria. The USSR and Japan would not clash until the Soviets invaded days before Japan formally surrendered on **September 2, 1945**. Japan occupied French Indochina in **July 1941** placing itself in position to launch the Southern Operation, the conquest of Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, and Commonwealth possessions. War against the Western colonial powers would commence at **0215 hours, December 8, 1941**, Tokyo time.<sup>1</sup>

## CONSCRIPTION

All Japanese males from 17 to 40 were liable for military service, a fact of life since 1873. At age 17 young men registered at their local police station giving their domicile of origin (*honseki*), that is, their parents' home, where they probably still resided. If an individual moved away, he was required to report his present domicile (*genjushu*). The Home Islands were divided into 14 divisional districts (*shikan*) plus two in Korea and one on Formosa. Each divisional district was divided into two to five regimental conscription districts (*rentaiku*). The regimental district in which the individual's *honseki* lay would be his reporting station when called to the Emperor's service by the Military Administration Bureau (*Heimu Kyoku*). Even Japanese living in Manchuria and China were obligated and took their examinations at local military headquarters.

Deferments were few, mainly going to students who may have postponed their service up to age 26 depending on the type of schooling, and those who could prove their service would cause a family hardship.

<sup>1</sup> Japanese forces used Tokyo time (Time Zone 21) regardless of location.

The deferment was extendable at two-year intervals. Criminals were exempt as were the physically and mentally disabled. Men could volunteer between the ages of 17 and 20 and there was a pre-conscription apprentice training program for young men to learn technical skills. From 1938 Koreans could volunteer, as could Formosans from 1942. Those living overseas could postpone their examination one year at a time, unless they returned to Japan for 90 days or more. This included colonists living in the Japanese Mandated Islands (Marianas, Marshalls, Carolines).

The young man who would turn 20 between August 1 and December 2 reported for examination and testing between April 16 and July 31 before his birthday. If his birthday was after December 2, he reported between April 16 and July 31 after his birthday. In 1943 the reporting age was lowered to 19. From 1944 Koreans could be conscripted and from 1945 Formosans. Both had been recruited, or press-ganged, into Japanese service since 1942 as unarmed laborers receiving no military training. (Korea and Formosa had been Japanese possessions since 1910 and 1895, respectively.)

Those available for active service (*genekihei*) were divided into two categories, Class A – 5ft (1.52m) tall and in good physical condition, and Class B-1 – 4ft 11in (1.5m) and of slightly less able physical condition (mainly minor sight or hearing difficulties). Class B-2 and B-3 conscripts were the same as B-1, but with poorer sight and hearing. They were assigned to the Conscript Reserve (*Hojuhe*) and could be called up for reserve training not to exceed 180 days over the next 17 years and 4 months. Eye, ear, and teeth problems were common because of an often vitamin-deficient diet. During the war many of these reservists were called to active service. Those rated as Class C due to poor physical condition, between 4ft 9in and 4ft 11in (1.45–1.5m), and not suffering from a disabling ailment, were assigned to the Second National Army until age 40. Class D, those less than 4ft 9in (1.45m) or suffering from certain ailments which could not be improved, were exempt. Class F was for those with temporary ailments, who were reexamined annually.

Soldiers completing their active service were assigned to the First Reserve (*Yobieki*) for 17 years and 4 months. They could be called up for a maximum of five 35-day periods or for fewer periods if such call-ups had been extended up to 50 days. Most First Reserve soldiers had been recalled to service between 1939 and 1941 for duty in China, Manchuria, and the upcoming Pacific War (*Taiheiyo Senso*). After completing that duty they were assigned to the First National Army until age 40. Class C personnel and those of Classes A and B who were not needed for active service were assigned to the Second National Army. The two National Armies (*Kokuminhei*) were not actual formations, merely categories of trained and untrained reservists, respectively.

In October 1942 student deferments were cancelled, except for students in certain medical and scientific fields. Highly skilled factory technicians were also exempt. In December 1943 the conscription age was lowered to 19, and to 18 in June 1944, when the term of active service was extended to three years – although this was not specified to be for the war's duration, it was. Men were now liable for service until age 45. Japanese residing in occupied areas (Philippines, Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, etc.) who had been allowed to delay their entry examinations also became liable for service.

The prospective soldier received a postcard that ordered him to report for examination and assigned him a reporting date and location. There were over 10,000 military affairs clerks located throughout Japan's prefectures (*ken*) managing the army and navy conscription system (*Chohei Seido*). Each clerk was responsible not only for maintaining the records of 200–300 possible conscripts, but also the various categories of reservists residing in their regimental district, being familiar with the individual's work and family situations, and reporting changes in address and status. The conscription notices were delivered to the police station from the regimental district headquarters and a policeman or the military affairs clerk would take them to the mayor. They would be opened in his presence and delivered, often at night. If the conscript was residing elsewhere, the notice was turned over to a parent and he or she was legally liable for its delivery. The mayor and clerk were reprimanded if the subject failed to report.

Clerks and other officials were busy in the late summer and fall of 1937 when call-ups were sent after the beginning of the China Incident. Call-ups for the coming Pacific War began in July 1941, with notices delivered in great secrecy and conscripts told to report at night without the usual family fanfare. Levels of volunteers rose significantly in the first few months of the Pacific War, but quickly dropped off.

By 1944 even Class C and D individuals were being called up and 17 and 18-year-olds were being strongly "encouraged" to volunteer. Mayors, assemblymen, other local government officials, and military affairs clerks were exempted from service. By the war's end they too were being called up, with the exception of the clerks, without whom the army and navy could not be maintained.

The red notification card, called the Red Paper (*Akagami*), ordered our recruit, Taro,<sup>2</sup> to report to his training depot on a given date. In the few days before he was to report, his family began work on the "belt of a thousand stitches" (*sen'ninbari*). This was a white cloth belt several inches in width that could be wound around the waist. The women would journey around their village or neighborhood asking everyone they met to sew in a stitch for good fortune. The stitches of thick black yarn could be formed in straight lines or a pattern such as a tiger (representing ferocity). A five-*sen* coin with a hole in the center was sometimes sewn on, because the number was higher than four (*shi*), which also means death. It was believed the belt might cause bullets to miss. Small wooden panels (*ema*) with best wishes were placed in the local Shinto shrine in the recruit's memory. The conscript was often presented with a small rising sun flag (*Hinomaru*) inscribed with good wishes and the names of family and friends. Even poor families did their best to prepare a memorable farewell feast. On the day of departure, banners were hung offering prayers and congratulations, and marching parties (*sokokai*) trooped through the neighborhood. A small rising sun flag was flown over the homes of men called to

A rare "cap of a thousand stitches". As with the similarly named belt, the women of a soldier's family asked friends and neighbors to sew in a stitch for good luck before the recruit departed for service. This cap was worn beneath the steel helmet. (Velmer Smith Collection)



<sup>2</sup> Taro, meaning "boy", is roughly analogous to "John Doe" or "Tommy Atkins". We will simply refer to our subject soldier as Nito-hei (Private 2nd class) Taro.



In an idyllic setting two infantrymen pose for a snapshot to be sent home. They wear their Type 99 (1939) gasmasks in the ready position on their chests. The gasmask was more commonly carried on the left of the waist.

the colors and their families set a place for them at meals. As the recruits boarded a train under the care of an NCO, family and friends bid farewell, shouting "*Tenno heika banzai!*" ("May the Emperor live ten thousand years!"). They departed to serve their Emperor to the solemn notes of the *Kimigayo*, the national anthem. As the war wore on such sendoffs became more subdued.

The attitude of the individual soldier towards his service varied over time. As the China Incident wore on, more recruits and reservists were called to serve the Emperor and it was known that service in China came with a high degree of risk. To some extent the country was already experiencing war weariness before the Pearl Harbor attack. By 1943 it was recognized that the Empire was suffering high casualty rates and the mortal implications of service grew through the remainder of the war.

Regardless, a young man called to serve the Emperor usually experienced a degree of excitement and pending adventure, as well as apprehension. He expected to be sent overseas, an exciting prospect in spite of his perilous future, especially since he had seldom traveled further than

the horizon beyond his home town. A less willing recruit was simply resigned to his fate, especially among the lower classes. He had no alternatives, no chance of avoiding conscription through family influence or opportunities for posting to less hazardous technical units, NCO schools, or officer training. He knew that military life was hard, that he would experience tough discipline, and he vaguely knew of the brutality and unbending discipline, but to serve the Emperor and to bring honor on his family he was willing to make sacrifices.

## TRAINING

Since 1930 Japanese children were required to complete at least six years' education in primary schools. Those fortunate enough to receive further education attended middle and high school for five years. From age eight (3rd grade) boys received minimal military training from teachers. In middle and high schools and universities, active military officers provided training. This training was only two to four hours a week with possibly a four- to six-day annual field exercise. Youth schools offered military training to those who had completed only six years' education and were now employed in the work force. During the war middle and high schools were required to expand their military training so as to produce cadets, while universities were essentially transformed into reserve military academies.

Japanese society had already prepared future soldiers for military life in that it required obedience to and respect for elders, a degree of regimentation with endless government rules and regulations strictly enforced by the police and local authorities, the demand for individual

conformity, crowded living and working environments, and Spartan conditions.

Before the war, recruit training lasted three to six months. Recruits were assigned to a depot division (*rusu shidan*), of which one was assigned to each divisional conscription district. Besides recruit training they equipped and provided refresher training to recalled reservists, dispatched replacements to field units, organized new field units, and arranged for the return of casualties and the ashes of the dead. When new infantry divisions and non-divisional units were raised the depot division provided drafts of recruits, not always trained, and cadres of officers and NCOs drawn from other units.

Once assigned to his replacement training regiment, Nito-hei Taro was issued his uniform and equipment. Under peacetime conditions he underwent recruit training from January to May. One of his earliest experiences was the first of many readings of the *Imperial Receipt to Soldiers and Sailors*<sup>3</sup> by an officer. This stipulated his duties, responsibilities, and what was expected of him in the Emperor's service. There was no military oath in the Western sense, just complete obedience to the *Imperial Receipt*.

Whether receiving his training in a replacement or field unit, Taro was assigned to a training unit (*naumu han*) within his company. This consisted of 20–30 recruits under the charge of a corporal or sergeant and was organized into two sections (*buntai*), analogous to a US squad. There was no set number of *han* in a company; it depended on the company's strength and available NCOs. The *han* trained, messed, and quartered together. It was not until a rifle company (*chutai*) was deployed to the field that it was reorganized into three rifle platoons (*shotai*) of, usually, three light machine gun sections and a grenade discharger section with a lieutenant commanding. During training it was seldom that Taro saw officers, only during the frequent readings of the *Imperial Receipt to Soldiers and Sailors* and inspections. The *Five Principles of Battle Ethics* – loyalty, courtesy, courage, truthfulness, and frugality – were taught as well. These were extracted from the Field Service Code (*Senjinkun*) published on January 3, 1941. Training was repetitious and by rote memory with swift punishment for inattention, negligence, and errors.

Complete subservience and obedience to all superiors was demanded. While officers endured the same hardships in the field as their men, they did not directly participate in any group effort or work. Their philosophy was that they gathered the efforts of the group and directed them in a unified endeavor.

Most regular officers were graduates of the vast system of military preparatory schools and academies. At age 14 to 15 junior cadets would enter a preparatory school. In theory it was open to all who could pass



Two recruits, wearing *kendo* (wooden sword fighting) protective outfits, practice bayonet-fighting techniques with wooden rifles with padded ends. The instructor, an acting sergeant, holds his own significantly larger wooden rifle with which to “reinforce” teaching points. Perfection was sought after in training and even the most minor infractions, omissions, and errors were corrected swiftly and often brutally.

<sup>3</sup> Issued by Emperor Mutsuhito on January 4, 1884.

### Japanese Army Enlisted Ranks

Warrant officers (*jun-I* – called *toku-mu so-sho* before September 15, 1940) held command and administrative assignments in unit headquarters and were treated as officers. There were only three NCO (*kashi-kan*) grades. Sergeants major (*so-cho*) were the equivalent of US 1st sergeants at company level.

Sergeants (*gun-so*) might be platoon liaison NCOs (platoon sergeants) or section leaders. Most section leaders, however, were corporals (*go-cho*), the lowest NCO grade. The highest private soldier (*hei*) rank of lance corporal (*hei-cho*) was added on September 15, 1940, and they usually served as assistant section leaders. There were three other private grades, which were achieved by time in service and performance. From highest to lowest: superior private (*joto-hei*), private 1st class (*itto-hei*), and private 2nd class (*nito-hei*). The ranks of acting sergeant (*joto-hei kimmu sha*) and acting corporal (*kimmu joto-hei*) are often seen on rank insignia charts, but were abolished on September 15, 1940.

#### ENLISTED RANK INSIGNIA

Red backing, yellow stripes, white stars.



Sergeant Major (*So-cho*)



Sergeant (*Gun-so*)



Corporal (*Go-cho*)



Lance Corporal (*Hei-cho*)



Superior Private (*Joto-hei*)



Private 1st Class (*Itto-hei*)



Private 2nd Class (*Nito-hei*)

the rigid exams, but the family had to pay the considerable food cost and this kept the lower classes out. Enlisted men under 22 and NCOs under 25 could apply for an academy, but most officer cadets were from upper-class families and applied between 16 and 18. Reserve officers were selected from conscripts with at least two years of high school and who had passed an exam, which they studied for on their own during their first three months of conscript training. After another three months a second exam divided them into officer and NCO candidates. Infantry officer candidates undertook 6–11 months' training at one of seven reserve officer schools. After that they served with a field unit on probation for four months and were then placed in the reserves or retained on active service if required. Most line officers in infantry units were products of this training.

Enlisted men were selected for NCO training after three months' basic training or later in their service. This was a voluntary move and they were expected to become career NCOs. They continued their unit training for another nine months, but were given additional responsibilities, instruction, and study. Infantry NCO candidates attended one of three one-year NCO schools (*Kyodo Gakko*) in Japan or one in Manchuria (the training period was shortened during the war). Technical specialists destined for duties such as signals, ordnance, medical, veterinary, intendants (administrative), supply, and so forth were assigned to infantry units and trained in divisional courses or formal branch service schools.

Recruit training initially focused on the care and use of Taro's uniform and equipment, rank identification, courtesies to superiors, and individual and section drill with endless marching. He learned the procedures and responsibilities of guard duty. While not a formal part of the recruit's schooling, Taro also learned the intricacies of soldier hierarchy and his place as the lowest of the low. The primary goal of training, including the graduated abuses inflicted by all above him, was immediate and unquestioned obedience to orders. Without this the army could not have functioned as it did. Every mistake, every omission, any lack of vigilance and attention was swiftly and harshly dealt with by those above. The infantryman was trained through a gradual toughening process with increasingly longer forced marches and endurance tests. Short rations and severe water conservation were typical. Recruits returning from forced marches were ordered to upend their canteens. Those whose canteens emptied first were beaten and reprimanded as weak-willed. Surprisingly, when considering the degree of toughness expected of soldiers, they did not spend any more than five days in the field at a time for fear of affecting their health. In February a five-day "snow march" was conducted where the soldiers learned to live in cold weather conditions. While soldiers kept diaries and wrote letters home, the abuses and harsh conditions were seldom mentioned. Such talk was not permitted and the hard surroundings were simply a fact of life.

A major part of Nito-hei Taro's training was marksmanship and maintenance of the rifle. The amount of ammunition allotted to target practice dwindled during the war. Individual accuracy was

**LEFT** Recruits undergo stretching exercises before beginning the day's rigors. As always an NCO watches their every move. Constant direct supervision was the order of the day. Even "free time" was supervised. A soldier's conduct and performance was constantly monitored and corrections made quickly and usually harshly in order to ensure the lesson was remembered.



not a major concern though, as massed rifle and machine-gun fire was the preferred method of combat. While there were exceptions, individually speaking Japanese soldiers were only fair marksmen. Bayonet fighting was regarded as essential and was psychologically linked to Japan's past sword-wielding warriors. The rudiments of section tactics were taught, but without the benefit of integrated supporting weapons.

As the war went on, even in China before the Pacific War began, deployed units were increasingly sent untrained recruits to be trained by the field unit. From 1937 units began to receive recruits and recalled reservists (*hojuhei*) every few months rather than on an annual cycle. If small numbers were received they were simply integrated into platoons. If a unit received a large number of untrained or partly trained recruits they might be organized into training companies and trained by NCOs detached from line companies. Individual and small unit training could be erratic for units in China and Manchuria. The recruits might be committed to combat or engaged in security operations, and while the recruits gained experience, their training was neither complete nor efficient.

Once assigned to a unit, individuals were selected to man light machine guns and grenade dischargers. Others were assigned to battalion machine-gun, regimental infantry gun or antitank companies. Here they learned to operate and maintain their new weapons and function as a crew. They were assigned a crew number and trained in a specific duty – gunner, loader, ammunition carrier, etc. They undoubtedly learned how to handle other crew duties, but had little opportunity to perform them. It is not completely true that if a machine gunner was killed the other crewmen were incapable of operating the weapon; they knew how to, but their restraint was more a matter of motivation or fear of violating a rule, as it was not their place to assume



**ABOVE** A corporal demonstrates the manual of arms – rifle movements – as recruits look on. In the background selected recruits receive individual attention in dismounted drill. The 1920 service cap is worn here, distinctive with a red cap band.

such a responsibility if not ordered to do so by a superior. The deeply instilled sense of harmony, that is, not deviating from what was required or expected, and fear of affronting a superior, was as much a part of this rigid mindset as any lack of training.

Those with comparable civilian skills or demonstrating the ability to perform special tasks were selected from within Taro's company to be specialist soldiers (*tokugyo hei*). NCOs or others skilled in the task trained the novices. Specialists were promoted after completing a year's service and demonstrating their skill. They included armorers, cobblers, tailors, buglers, barbers, cooks, and medical orderlies. These specialists were exempt from general work details and guard duty. The company was an extended family and in garrison was fairly well self-contained in regards to routine services.

After three months of training, unit officers conducted the "first-quarter inspection" (*ikki ken-etsu*). This was of several days' duration and consisted of barracks and field inspections plus tests in which soldiers demonstrated their skills from drill and bayonet to reciting the *Imperial Receipt to Soldiers and Sailors* and the *Five Principles of Battle Ethics*.

Unit training progressed through a year-long schedule beginning with individual and section training and culminating in regimental or divisional autumn maneuvers. January to May was spent on training and integrating recruits, section tactics, rifle and bayonet training, and cold weather conditioning. June and July meant more rifle and bayonet practice, platoon and company tactics, crew-served weapons training, 18½-mile- (30km) per-day marches, and constructing field fortifications. August saw a continuation of company training as well as battalion exercises, tactical firing, more bayonet drill, swimming, and 25-mile (40km) marches. Marches were increasingly longer and faster with full equipment, often conducted over rugged terrain and in harsh weather. Battalion and regimental exercises were conducted in October and November with live-fire exercises and the large unit maneuvers. Unit training was demanding and unending. Physical and mental toughening by exposure to the elements under progressively harsh conditions was the standard. Officers fully participated in the training alongside their men. While discipline was unforgiving, units developed a close-knit

Companies were assigned a number of specialist soldiers, including buglers. Bugles were relied on to communicate commands to units deployed tactically. Here three buglers demonstrate their skills to other buglers.





Infantrymen practice breaching a barbed wire obstacle with wire cutters as an NCO looks on. Prewar conditions allowed such meticulous training, but during the war this and similar types of training were curtailed in the rush to teach only the most basic skills.

loyalty and soldiers were imbued with a great deal of unit pride. December saw the discharge of those completing their active service, plus the maintenance of equipment and facilities, and preparation for the next training year and its influx of replacements.

After six months' service Taro was eligible for promotion to private 1st class (*itto-hei*), though not all his comrades were. After a year they and company specialists could be promoted to superior private (*joto-hei*).

Training deteriorated through the war as lower quality personnel were drafted, qualified instructors dwindled, and training resources and facilities proved inadequate for the growing army. Previously only small numbers of young men from the teeming inner cities were conscripted, as they tended to be more unruly, less subservient, and unused to the hardships of field life. They were now drafted in large numbers to provide the necessary manpower, but proved troublesome and were poorly adapted to jungle warfare. The myth that the Japanese soldier was a natural jungle fighter was just that; the Japanese had conducted no such training and the terrain and climate in Japan and China did not provide the right training environment. They were initially successful because they were tough, conditioned to hardship, disciplined, and had total faith in their will.

## APPEARANCE

Japan's first military uniforms were purchased from France in the 1870s. While the wartime uniforms were still European in style, the Japanese soon introduced distinctive features. Three different models of uniforms were worn during the war. Each consisted of a tunic, trousers, overcoat, and raincoat. All three models were made in both wool and cotton versions for cold and warm climates/seasons. It was not uncommon for a soldier to have been issued all three models of uniform during the course of his service. Earlier models remained in use and existing stocks continued to be issued. In this way older models were worn throughout the war and were commonly mixed within units. There were also special tropical uniforms and work uniforms. All of these uniforms were of similar design, but with differences in collars, pocket layouts, cut details, and the quality of materials used. Uniform colors varied greatly from greenish tan to dark olive-drab or green. The official color was a warm olive green; Japan went from dark blue to olive-drab uniforms in 1912. Buttons could be made of brass,

bronze-plated steel, green-painted steel, green or brown plastic, brown Bakelite, or painted wood depending on when produced.

Wool tunics (*guni*) were partly lined with white or off-white cotton cloth, as were the inside of the wool trousers from the knees up. Five-button tunics had a small pocket in the left inside front of the skirt for a field dressing. Wool tunics had a second internal pocket inside the left breast. The tunic, overcoat, and raincoat had an integral buttoned retaining loop on the left side of the waist to hold the bayonet frog in place and help support the leather service belt's weight. The trousers (*gunko*), instead of having a normal belt, had three belt loops positioned well below the waistband, one on each side and one on the back, through which ran a doubled tie-tape with the single tape free ends to be tied at the front over the buttoned fly. Tie-tapes secured the trouser cuffs. Trousers had only two internal side pockets.

Taro's Showa Type 5 (1930)<sup>4</sup> tunic had a standing collar and internal breast pockets with scallop-shaped button flaps, not unlike the black or blue student uniforms he was familiar with. Rank insignia were tabs on the shoulder seams secured by two small loops. He may also have received the Type 98 (1938) uniform with a stand-and-fall collar on which rank insignia tabs were sewn. Type 5 uniforms remained in use throughout the war, but Taro would not have worn the old colored branch swallowtail flashes which were worn on the collars with brass unit numbers or special insignia devices or the 30 × 90mm rank shoulder tabs. These were deleted from older uniforms when the Type 98 was introduced and instead 20 × 45mm Type 98 collar rank was worn. The Type 98 retained Type 5 breast pockets, but added internal skirt pockets with buttonless flaps. Taro may or may not have later been issued a Type 3 (1943) uniform. This was essentially of the same cut as the Type 98, but of simplified design and made with lower quality and substitute materials. With it were introduced 20 × 40mm rank insignia with the stars moved toward the backing's leading edge. These uniforms were used for service, field, and off-duty wear.

Wool overcoats (*gaito*) were unfamiliar garments to Taro. These were unlined, single-breasted with five buttons, possessed relatively small stand-and-fall collars and internal waist pockets with buttonless flaps, and lacked waist belts. Lined detachable hoods large enough to be worn over the helmet could be fitted. Type 98 collar rank was worn on all overcoats. The Types 98 and 3 overcoats differed from the Type 5 mainly in the use of poorer and substitute materials such as plastic or wooden buttons. The raincoats were similar in design to the overcoats, but were double-breasted with two rows of five buttons and made of tightly woven cotton. Detachable hoods were provided. When the Type 3 uniform was adopted, the Type 98 raincoat was retained. Few enlisted men were issued raincoats.

Taro would have appreciated the tropical uniforms he was issued in Pusan before departing for the South Seas. These were introduced well

<sup>4</sup> During the Showa era, beginning in 1926, the last two digits of the Japanese calendar year indicated most model designations. For example, the Western year 1938 was 2598 and an item adopted that year was designated Type 98. (Here the Western year follows in parenthesis.) The Japanese calendar begins in the Western Gregorian calendar year of 660 BC. The designation 2600 (1940) was indicated as Type 100 and 2601 (1941) as Type 1. During the preceding Taisho (1912–26) and Meiji eras (1868–1912) designations were indicated by the year from the beginning of the Emperor's reign. Hence the Meiji Type 30 (1905) rifle was adopted in the 30th year of the Meiji reign. The name of the era (which was not the Emperor's name, but a phrase describing the era; Showa – "Enlightened Peace"), had to be included in the designation to fully identify the year. Showa though was not included in the designation, as the Japanese calendar year was used. One exception was the Showa Type 5 (1930) uniform (which was also known as the Type 90 (1930) uniform, using the Japanese calendar).

before the war, for wear in the South Seas Mandated Islands. Early issues were tan cotton, but medium to dark green became more common. They had open collars, buttoned side vent flaps below the armpits, pleated patch pockets with flaps, and patch skirt pockets without flaps, although later models had Type 98 internal skirt pockets with buttonless flaps. Trousers could be full length, three-quarter length, or loose-fitting breeches style. Knee-length shorts were also available for informal wear with the tropical lightweight cotton shirt, which had only three front buttons, three-quarter-length sleeves, and patch breast pockets with small squared flaps. This was often worn as an outer garment and might have had rank insignia sewn on the collar or sometimes above the right breast pocket. It was common for officers to wear lightweight white or off-white tropical shirts as an outer garment with the green tropical trousers. When officers wore a green tropical tunic the shirt's collar would be worn exposed over the tunic collar.

Olive-drab or white cotton work uniforms were cut similar to the Type 5 and had plastic buttons of the uniform color. It was common to see Taro on work details wearing a white tunic with regular olive-drab trousers.

Field caps (*ryakubo*) were made in both wool and cotton and adopted in 1938. They had a short semi-rigid visor, a brown leather or artificial leather adjustable chinstrap, normally worn above the visor, and a tie-cord in the back slit for adjusting size. The crown had a characteristic shallow front-to-back crease and there were two or three vent eyelets in each side. A yellow five-point star was embroidered on a pentagon-shaped or circular cloth backing sewn to the cap's front. A tan four-flap Havelock was sometimes worn on the cap for neck protection from the sun, attached by small hooks fitting in thread loops around the outside of the cap band.

Taro was issued one winter, one summer, and one work uniform plus an overcoat. A spare uniform was not carried in the field. In the tropics a regular tropical field uniform was issued along with another with a short-sleeve shirt and shorts. Overall Taro found a great deal of latitude in regards to uniform wear in the tropics.

The Type 92 (1932) steel helmet (officially *tetsubo* – steel cap) was a simple chrome molybdenum steel dome with a short rim protruding equally all round. It was originally referred to as a steel helmet (*tetsukabuto*), which Taro still called it. A star was soldered to the front and the helmet (and star) painted olive-drab. They were sometimes whitewashed in winter. A tan, olive-drab or green two-layer, fiber-insulated linen cover was available with a yellow star sewn on the front. The leather suspension system was held in place by tie-cords. An elaborately laced tie-tape system secured the helmet under the chin. Bullets and fragments easily penetrated the low-grade steel. Typically Taro reversed the field cap and wore it beneath the helmet.

While most Japanese habitually wore sandals, the army issued light-brown horsehide Type 5 marching shoes (*henjoka*). Taro and many others experienced difficulties adapting to the heavy, confining ankle boots. The leather soles were hobnailed and a J-shaped steel cleat was nailed to the heel protecting the outer and back edges. From 1943 rubber-soled shoes were issued with molded circular grips. Shoes were also made of pigskin as an economy measure. Taro preferred the lightweight ankle-high black canvas shoes with rubber soles known as *jikatabi* or *tabi*.



Soldiers were expected to maintain their own clothing and equipment, and units possessed workshops for this purpose. Here soldiers make minor repairs to their marching shoes. Unit cobblers and tailors were assigned for more sophisticated repairs.

around the top. Homemade rigid woven rice straw (*waraji*) or wooden (*geta*) sandals were often worn in barracks or on bivouac.

Taro's flannel-lined light cotton undershirt (*juban*) was off-white or light green. It had a four-button front opening and was collarless. It had patch breast pockets with rectangular buttoned flaps and was long-sleeved with button cuffs. His breechcloth (*fundoshi*) was a white cotton rectangular section of cloth, wrapped around the groin and waist and secured in place by a tie-string on one end. Light green cotton or white wool long underdrawers (*koshita*) were worn in warm and cold weather, respectively. Tie-strings were attached to the waistband and cuffs. Socks were white and of the straight tube type. Heavy knit white cotton gloves were issued.

Unit insignia were little used. In some instances a small square or rectangular patch was sewn about the left breast pocket depicting a unit symbol. Sometimes small vertical rectangular cloth nametapes were attached above a breast pocket. The double-V branch insignia was abolished for combat arms in 1940. Regardless, it was seldom worn in the field. Even rank insignia were often removed in combat. In October 1943 some branches were authorized a thin colored strip on the bottom edge of their collar rank insignia, but this too was seldom worn.

The identity tag (*ninshikihyo*) was a  $1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  in ( $32 \times 50$ mm) aluminum or brass oval on a narrow cloth tape threaded through a small rectangular hole in each end. Since the dead were cremated there was no need for a second tag to remain with the body. Information was minimal.

The Soldier's Pay Record (*guntai techo*) was a  $3 \times 5$  in ( $76 \times 127$ mm) booklet bound in light olive-drab or tan cloth. Taro was admonished not to lose it or face severe punishment. Information included personal and parents' names, birth date and place, permanent and residential addresses, civilian schools, civilian employment, military qualifications, assignments, pay entries, awards, punishments, uniform sizes, etc. Only unit code numbers were entered rather than actual designations. Taro carried it in the inside left breast pocket of his wool tunic and the outer left breast pocket of his cotton and tropical tunics. Taro's comrades (*senyu*) were famous for keeping diaries and journals, which they took

These either had a conventional round toe or a split-toe with the big toe being separate. Shoe sizes were indicated by a *mon* number (an old 1 in/24mm diameter coin), for example, "9.5" or "10". Olive-drab wool or cotton puttees (*makikyahan*), for winter or summer wear, were wound around the lower legs from the ankles, covering the top of the shoes to below the knees. A tie-tape was sewn to one end. Long tie-tapes were wrapped across the shins in an X-pattern and short tie-tapes were wound

into combat. While they were cautioned not to enter information of military value, this was not well supervised and captured diaries proved beneficial to Allied intelligence.

A field dressing (*hotai*), gauze and cotton layers with tie-tapes, was issued in an olive-drab cloth package. An olive-drab cotton triangular bandage (*sankakukin*) (20in/500mm on two edges, 32in/825mm on the third) was wrapped in paper and often used as a scarf. Both were carried in a pocket in the left inside of Taro's tunic skirt.

Taro's hair was cut very close for sanitary reasons and to eliminate time-wasting grooming. The Japanese seldom found it necessary to shave and some did not carry shaving gear. Prolonged combat, however, found officers and men with scruffy thin chin-beards and mustaches. Mustaches were rare among enlisted men; they were more common among officers, but by no means worn by the majority.

In the field the Japanese Army prided itself on its scruffy appearance, even the officers, but arms and equipment were well maintained. However, their dusty, muddy and often stained uniforms, thread-bare collars and cuffs, patched trousers knees, mixed uniforms, unshaven faces, undershirts worn as outer garments in hot weather, and sweaty triangular neck scarves showed them to be veteran campaigners.

## EQUIPMENT

### Weapons

The Japanese Army, being a force centered around the infantry, viewed its most important weapons to be those arming its infantrymen: rifle, bayonet, light machine gun, grenade discharger, and hand grenade. Put simply, the Imperial Japanese Army was comparatively well armed in 1930, but by 1943 it was far out-classed by the Allies.

#### Japanese Infantry Weapons

Nambu 8mm Taisho Type 14 (1925) pistol  
8mm Type 94 (1934) pistol  
Arisaka 6.5mm Meiji Type 38 (1905) rifle  
Arisaka 6.5mm Type 97 (1937) sniper rifle  
Arisaka 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) rifle  
Arisaka 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) sniper rifle  
Nambu 6.5mm Taisho Type 11 (1922) light machine gun  
Nambu 6.5mm Type 96 (1936) light machine gun  
Nambu 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) light machine gun  
Nambu 6.5mm Taisho Type 3 (1914) heavy machine gun  
Nambu 7.7mm Type 92 (1932) heavy machine gun  
Nambu 7.7mm Type 1 (1941) heavy machine gun  
5cm Taisho Type 10 (1921) grenade discharger  
5cm Type 89 (1929) heavy grenade discharger  
Type 91 (1931) rifle grenade launcher  
Type 100 (1940) rifle grenade launcher  
Type 2 (1942) rifle grenade launcher  
Type 3 (1943) rifle grenade launcher  
2cm Type 97 (1937) antitank rifle  
7cm Type 92 (1932) infantry gun (aka battalion gun)  
7.5cm Meiji Type 41 (1908) infantry gun (aka regimental gun)  
3.7cm Type 94 (1934) infantry rapid-fire gun (aka "AT" gun)  
3.7cm Type 97 (1937) antitank gun  
4.7cm Type 1 (1941) antitank gun



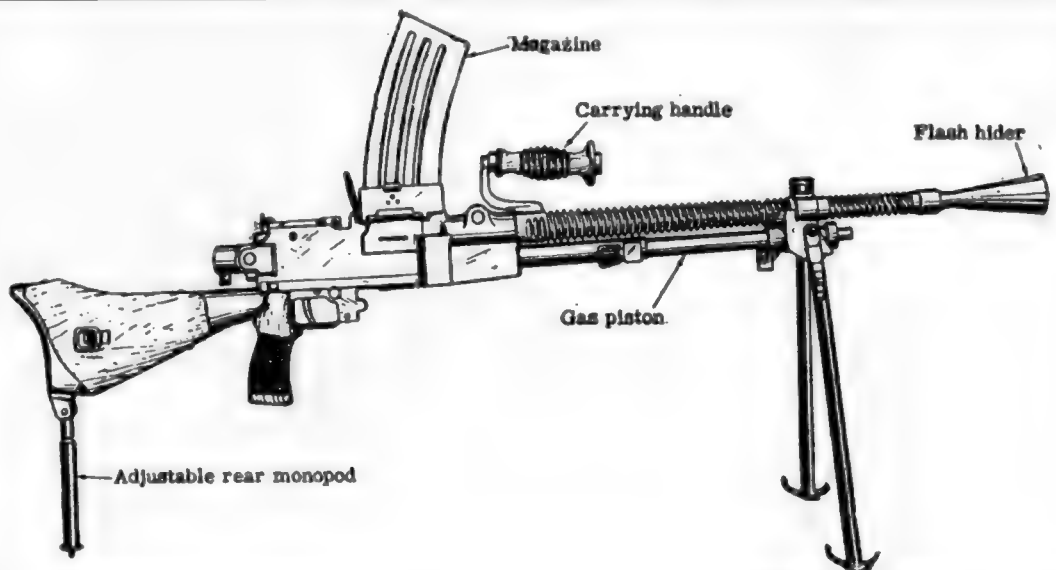
ABOVE A 5cm grenade discharger crew wearing tube packs.

The standard Japanese rifle and light machine-gun round was the 6.5mm. Even with a new bullet and more powerful propellant the 6.5mm provided insufficient range, penetration, and knockdown force on Manchurian and Chinese plains. In 1938 a new 7.7mm round was adopted along with a new rifle and light machine gun. Japanese rifles and machine guns were noted for emitting little muzzle flash and smoke. Besides the type of propellant, this was due to the rifles' long barrels, which resulted in most of the propellant being consumed in the bore. Divisions in Japan were the first armed with 7.7mm weapons in mid-1939, followed by units in China, then Manchuria. Many units on the mainland still had 6.5mm weapons at the beginning of the Pacific War. As units were deployed piecemeal into the Pacific, island defense forces might be armed with both 6.5mm and 7.7mm weapons in different battalions, causing ammunition supply problems.

Taro found the Arisaka 6.5mm Meiji Type 38 (1905) and 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) rifles (*shoju*) quite a handful for a 5ft (1.52m) tall soldier. While not as nicely finished as Western counterparts, they were as reliable and rugged as any five-shot bolt-action in use. The Type 38 rifle was 50 1/2 in long and the Type 99 rifle 50 in, and both weighed just over 9 lb.

While a well-designed rifle, there was nothing exceptional about the Type 38, apart from its Mauser-type action being stronger than the US M1903 Springfield's, of which the same could be said of the Type 99. Both rifles were provided with a simple leather, web, or rubberized canvas sling, metal muzzle cap, and sleeve-like dustcover that fitted over the bolt. Taro most likely discarded the dustcover, as it rattled, slowed the working of the bolt, and added a bit of weight. The Type 99, however, had several innovative features. These included a folding wire monopod to help support the long, heavy rifle when firing from a prone position and fold-down lead arms fitted to the rear leaf sight to aid in firing at aircraft, though it is doubtful these were of much value. Late war production Type 99s lacked the chromed bore, monopod, sling swivels, and cleaning rod, had a laminated stock with a wood butt plate,

**A Nambu 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) light machine gun. The 6.5mm Type 96 (1936) was almost identical. The Type 96 lacked the butt monopod and had a smaller barrel-locking catch. Riflemen protected light machine guns; light machine guns protected heavy machine guns.**



and a simple rear peep sight. They were produced with low-quality materials and today are considered unsafe to fire.

Along with every soldier, including those who did not carry a rifle, Taro was issued a Meiji Type 30 (1897) bayonet (*juken*) with a 15½ in blade. Taro knew it as the “burdock sword” (*gobo ken*), as the black-painted steel scabbard looked like a burdock (a vegetable). It had a J-shaped guard, which if deftly handled could hook the blade of an opponent’s bayonet, yanking his rifle from his hands. Late war production replaced the hooked guard with a straight one and olive-drab-painted wooden scabbards were sometimes issued.

Taro’s NCOs might carry the Type 95 (1935) sword (*shin-gunto*). Like the officer’s finer Type 94 (1934), it was of the traditional Japanese design with a single-edged, shallow curved blade with a small oval guard and long grip. Issue officer and NCO swords were machine made, as opposed to the hand-made ancient family blades carried by a minority of officers. Overall length averaged 39in and the blade 26½ in. The grip was solid copper or aluminum cast to simulate the officer’s green cord-wrapped grip. Officers sometimes wrapped their sword’s grip with white cloth to protect it. A leather strap with snap-hooks attached the scabbard to the special NCO’s belt. The metal scabbard (*saya*) was painted olive-drab. A brown leather NCO’s tassel was attached to the sword butt (officers had colored tassels indicating their rank category).

The two most common *heikikanju* or light machine guns (LMGs) were the Nambu 6.5mm Type 96 (1936) and 7.7mm Type 99 (1939). They were bipod mounted and fed by 30-round top-feeding magazines. Both had 2.5× telescopic sights and quick-change barrels. To emphasize the Japanese propensity for close combat, these 9kg (20lb) weapons could be fitted with a rifle bayonet. Although he was a rifleman, Taro knew how to operate the *rahambu*, as soldiers nicknamed them.

The obsolete Nambu 6.5mm Taisho Type 11 (1922) LMG was issued as a substitute in many units, even alongside the Type 96, and was used throughout the war. It had a unique feed hopper, doubling as an oil reservoir, in which six five-round rifle-charging clips were stacked. This feed mechanism tended to collect dirt and vegetation debris, causing jams. Besides a bipod, a tripod was also available. The Type 11 lacked a telescope sight and quick-change barrel.

The Nambu Taisho Type 14 (1925) pistol (*kenju*) was of poor design. The even more poorly designed Type 94 (1934) was produced only as a



Weapons are repaired in a unit armory while to the right soldiers repair leather equipment. Since unsecured weapons are present, an armed sentry stands guard beside the rifle rack to the left. The Imperial Army was extremely security conscious in regards to protecting supplies and equipment; they were after all the property of the Emperor.

lower-cost alternative to the more expensive and complex Type 14; it offered no improvement over the Type 14. Both fired an underpowered 8mm cartridge and used eight- and six-round magazines, respectively. Holsters were brown leather with one or two belt loops and a leather or web shoulder strap. The Type 14 had a hard leather clamshell cover with a spare magazine carried in a pocket inside the pistol compartment, and a pocket beneath the cover to hold two ten-round cartridge packets. The Type 94 holster had a simple flap with an external magazine pocket.

The 5cm Type 89 (1929) heavy grenade discharger (*jutekidanto*) was not only an important close-combat weapon, but was provided with a full-range of colored signal flares and smoke grenades (“dragons”). Besides rifled high-explosive (HE) and white phosphorus (WP) mortar rounds, the Type 89 could fire hand grenades with propellant charges fitted. The Taisho Type 10 (1921) grenade discharger (*tekidanto*) was still in wide use. Popularly called “knee mortars” by the Allies because of their curved base plates, these compact weapons could not be fired from the thigh, as rumored, without breaking a bone. Another theory for their nickname is that they were carried in a bag strapped to the thigh. This is not true – they were carried in a canvas case slung over the shoulder.

Taro learned about a wide variety of hand grenades (*shuryudan*). Japanese grenades had poor lethality and reliability. The most common were the Type 97 (1937), Type 91 (1931), and Type 99 (1939) HE; as well as various WP, smoke, and tear-gas grenades. The Japanese made a great number of expedient grenades, many of which were as dangerous to the user as the intended victims. Various models of cup- and spigot-type rifle grenade launchers (*tekidank*) were issued.

### Individual equipment

Taro was issued a bewildering array of belts, straps, pouches, bags, and carriers – personal equipment (*kojin sobi*). While Taro’s life was one of austerity and simplicity, this did not apply to his equipment. If it was a

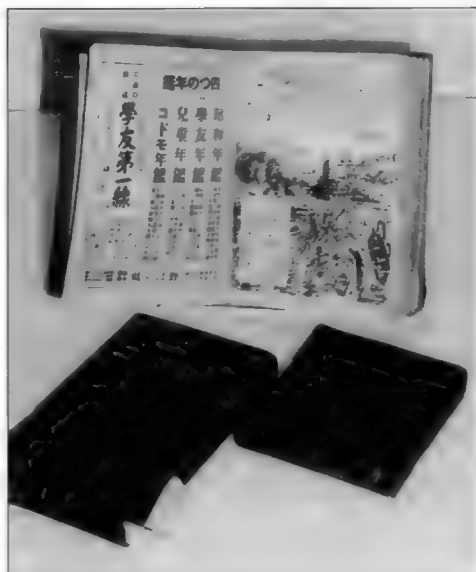
A key infantry weapon was the 5cm Type 89 (1929) heavy grenade discharger (*jutekidanto*), commonly misnamed the “knee mortar” by Allied troops. From left to right are an ammunition carrier (two carried by the gunner and the No. 2 gunner), an HE mortar round, a Type 97 (1937) hand grenade with a propellant charge, a colored smoke signal round (called a “dragon” by the Japanese), and bore cleaning brush. Beneath the discharger is a canvas carrying case, which was slung over the shoulder and not carried on the leg as rumored by Allied troops (hence its nickname).



piece of military equipment that could possibly be of use to a soldier, it was probably issued to Taro. He quickly learned that his equipment was the property of the Emperor and it was his responsibility to care for it, especially the rifle, the sole piece of equipment marked with the Imperial Chrysanthemum symbol. The equipment was European style, with occasional unique aspects, and had not changed significantly since before the turn of the century; nor would its basic design change much during the war.

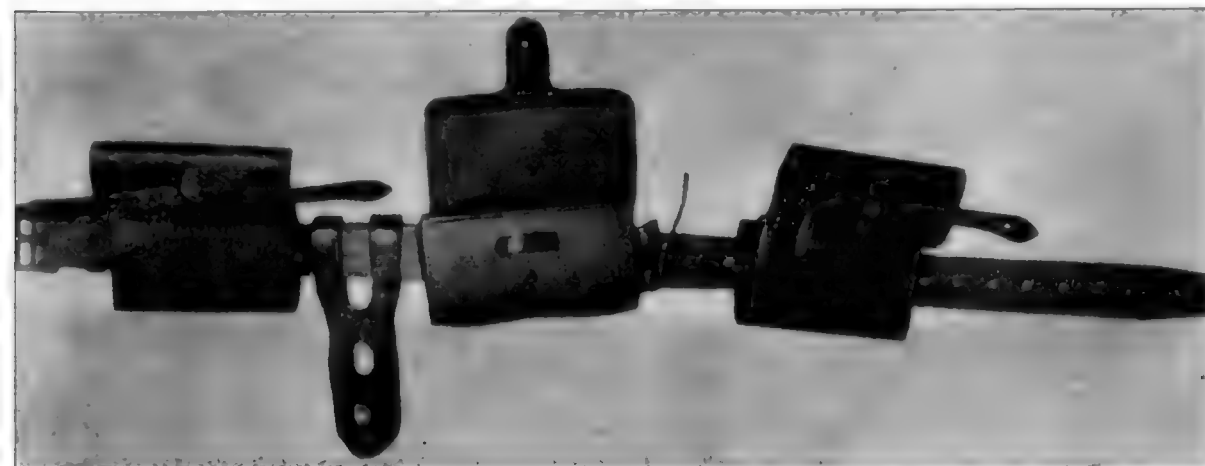
Early war issue equipment was of fairly high quality, and extensive use was made of leather along with cotton, canvas, and webbing. Horsehide leather (cowhide was too costly) items were light brown, but canvas gear varied greatly in shade from light tan to olive-drab. Metal fittings could be steel, brass, nickel, or aluminum. The marking of items varied, but might consist of the type (year) number, production date (often just the year), the manufacturer's code or logo, and sometimes a five-pointed star indicating army property. Officers' equipment was of significantly different design and higher quality in keeping with the class structure.

For Taro and other riflemen the basic Meiji Type 30 (1897) equipment consisted of a one-size-fits-all 1½in (45mm) wide, 3ft 3in (1m) long leather service belt (*obigawa*) fitted with two sliding loops (often discarded or lost) to secure the free end. The open-faced rectangular buckle could be brass, aluminum, or steel, the latter painted olive-green or black. Taro was issued three leather cartridge boxes (*danyakugo*). The two rigid rectangular boxes (*kogo*) fitting on his belt's front were unusual, as they had top-opening lids hinged on the upper front and secured by metal studs on the boxes' ends that fastened through leather tabs. This means of opening helped prevent Taro from losing ammunition if he inadvertently left the box open. On the back were two belt loops. The belt's free end could be retained by the cartridge box loops, which explains why the belt's sliding loops were often discarded. The boxes were divided into two compartments by a leather center divider, allowing three five-round charging clips to be held in each to give each box a capacity of 30 rounds of 6.5mm or



Other typical items carried by soldiers, a military songbook and bark cigarette cases. (Volmer Smith Collection)

The brown leather Meiji Type 30 (1897) infantry equipment (*kojin sobi*) consisted of the service belt, two 30-round cartridge boxes, a 60-round reserve cartridge box with oilcan, and a bayonet frog. While substitute materials replaced leather during the war, the basic equipment design remained unchanged.





An early war Type 94 (1934) 2 1/2-pint (1.25l) canteen. The stopper is held in place by a buckled leather strap. Later canteen stoppers were secured by a tie-tape. (Velmer Smith Collection)

7.7mm ammunition. Taro's reserve cartridge box (*zenko*) was worn centered on his belt's rear. It differed in design, being hinged in the rear and secured by a single stud and leather tab on the box's front center. On the right end were carrier straps holding a black or olive-drab metal or plastic oil bottle. The bottle had a stud on its cap to which the vertical strap was fastened to retain it. This larger box had three compartments with each holding four charging clips to total 60 rounds. In theory Taro could not use this reserve ammunition unless ordered. The leather bayonet frog was worn on his belt's left side, and consisted of either two narrow belt loops or a single wide one. The tunic's small integral cloth support strap was looped around the belt between the frog's two belt loops (those with a wide loop had a hole in which the support strap was fitted). The scabbard was slid through the retainer on which a small buckle and strap were fitted. At the top of the scabbard was a small metal bracket and the frog's strap was passed through this and secured by the buckle.

The Type 94 (1934) 2 1/2-pint canteen (*suito*) was of olive-drab-painted aluminum with a cork or wood stopper. The stopper was fitted to a metal cap with a ring attached. A thin web strap passed through the cap's ring and both ends were fastened to the canteen carrier by small buckles to hold it in place. The carrier was made of horizontal and vertical web straps. An adjustable shoulder strap was fitted to the carrier. This strap was slung over his left shoulder and passed under the belt to be carried over the haversack on his right hip. There was an older short-necked bottle-style 1-pint canteen still in wide use, which had either a leather or web carrier.

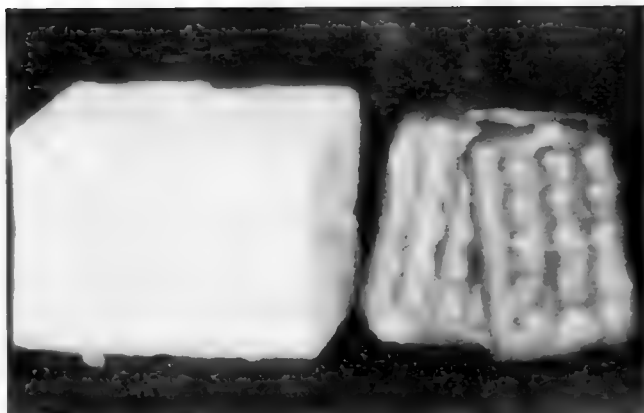
Taro's haversack (*zatsuno*) was a simple canvas single-compartment shallow bag with a large flap covering most of the bag's outer side for additional waterproofing. Its sides were pleated to allow it to expand when filled. A single strap or tie-tape secured the bag's opening and two more on the inside of the flap's bottom end secured it. A wide adjustable strap was slung over his left shoulder and passed under the belt to be carried beneath the canteen. On the back at the top was a metal flat hook that attached to the belt to take some of the haversack's weight. The haversack allowed Taro to carry essential items when his pack was not carried, such as on guard duty or during patrols. It was mainly intended for one day's tinned rations and up to five days of rice, sometimes carried in a spare sock. Chopsticks (*o-hashī*), a small knife (*kozuka*), sometimes a soup spoon and bowl, saké cup, and other small items might be carried.

The old-type backpack (*haino*) was a flat rectangular leather box with a wood internal frame. A single strap secured the large flap covering its entire back. Some were still being issued with the flap covered with Korean oxhide for waterproofing. All-canvas versions without frames began to be issued well before the war, and could have a large flap covering the entire back of the pack or only a short flap large enough to cover the top opening. In 1938 a new type of canvas pack was issued with a large flap, but once this was opened two horizontally opening flaps revealed the inside of the pack. Straps and edge binding were usually

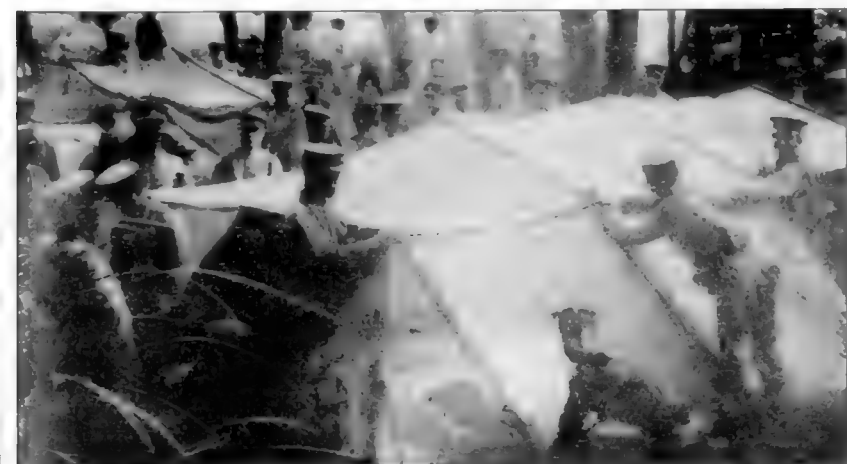
leather. A wartime version was made of rubberized canvas. All types of packs had pairs of buckled straps or tie-tapes on the sides and top to secure bedrolls. These packs measured 5 × 13 × 13in (127 × 330 × 330mm).

The backpack's integral shoulder straps were attached to the top of the pack, ran over the top of the shoulders and at the pit of the shoulders split into two narrow straps. One, with adjusting eyelets, ran back under the armpits to attach to buckles on the pack. The other had a flat metal hook, and was attached to the service belt behind the ammunition pouches to help support the belt's weight. Taro knew this tangle of straps as "octopus legs" (*takoashi*). His haversack and canteen straps were worn beneath his pack straps, but the gasmask case's strap was worn over his pack straps.

Taro's pack contents were simple: spare breechcloth and undershirt, two pairs of socks, towel, toilet articles in a ditty bag (*hokobukuro*) with soap box, toothbrush, cleaning brush, scissors, and sewing kit; some carried a razor, possibly rations, and sandals. His bedroll was strapped to the outside of the pack in a "horseshoe roll" with a blanket and shelter-half rolled on top. In the winter an additional blanket might be carried along with the overcoat. The tan or olive-drab 62 × 72in (1575 × 1829mm) wool and cotton-blend blanket (*mofu*) had hemmed edges. Later production shoddy wool blankets were smaller, thinner, and often had raw edges. The shelter-half (*tenmaku*) was a 56 × 59in (1422 × 1498mm) tan or olive-drab canvas rectangle with grommets and tie-tapes or cords along the two long edges. These allowed Taro and another to fasten together their two halves to form a two-man tent. Each soldier carried a two-piece wooden tent pole and two wooden tent stakes. Additional shelter-halves could be fastened together to make larger tents with designs provided using up to 28 shelter-halves. Such large shelters were seldom-used, however. In the center of one end was a length of cord allowing the shelter-half to be suspended from the shoulders and tied



Hardtack crackers (*kanpan*) were issued with tinned meat or fish. Rice was cooked by the soldier or in field kitchens and distributed in insulated containers.



A section assembles its shelter-halves into a larger tent. This version required 16 shelter-halves.

under the chin as a rain cape, which was generally preferred over the raincoat. A cord loop fastened through grommets at chest-level held the front closed. When not inside a shelter, Taro would simply roll up in his overcoat, blanket, and shelter-half as a simple sleeping bag.

Taro was provided with a 6ft-long tube pack (*seoibukuro*) made of olive-drab canvas lined with white cloth and sewn across the center to form two compartments. It was open at both ends with cloth strips extending beyond the ends and a pair of tie-tapes to tie it shut. A pair of larger tie-tapes was sewn to the center portion. It could be worn slung over his right shoulder and around his left hip like a horseshoe roll or carried around his waist over the equipment belt. The center tie-tape secured it in place. The pack was used to carry spare clothing and rations when traveling, similar to a Western duffel bag, but was sometimes used in the field.

Taro found that one of the most important items was the shovel (*enpi*). This was carried in a canvas case, blade down, attached to the left side of the pack with the wooden handle detached. A length of rope secured the handle to the blade. Most European entrenching tools had short fixed handles. The Japanese system allowed a longer handle, providing a more efficient tool. When assembled the handle was inserted in the spade's handle socket. The knotted end of the rope ran through a hole in the handle about one-third its length from its knobbed end. It was threaded through a hole beside the blade's socket, with several turns made around the socket, and pulled tight to hold the handle and blade together. It is often suggested that the rope's only purpose was to allow it to be carried slung over the shoulder. One in three infantrymen carried a small pickax rather than an entrenching tool. This had a detachable head carried in a long canvas triangular-shaped case on the pack. Other men might carry a small sickle for clearing brush and cutting camouflage materials, or a wire cutter. Most tool handles were left as natural wood, but were sometimes painted olive-drab.

The olive-drab-painted aluminum, kidney-shaped mess kit, called a rice cooker (*hangou*), was similar to German and Russian models, but more elaborate. It consisted of four components: cover, which also served as a food tray, side-dish pan, and soup pot, which nested in a rice pot. The rice and soup pots both had wire bail handles. The rice cooker was attached to the back of the pack by a strap threaded through brackets on the cover's side and on the rice pot. A simplified model lacked the soup pot. Fur-lined canvas covers were available for the canteen and rice cooker to protect them from freezing.

Taro's gasmask case was a simple canvas bag with a flap secured by a single stud fastener and an adjustable shoulder strap. The strap was worn over his right shoulder with the bag carried on his left side, and could be rigged with the case worn on his chest to allow faster

Japanese optical equipment, influenced by German designs, was of sturdy construction and provided good definition, but was not "tropic-proofed" and so was affected by heat and humidity. These 7x50 binoculars are provided with colored eyepiece filters, which improved vision on moonlit nights and in fog or mist.



donning. Two types of gasmasks (*hiko*) were commonly issued. Both had heavy light-brown treated fabric face-pieces, removable circular eyepieces, six adjusting straps on the back of the head, a brown rubber corrugated hose, and an olive-drab-painted oval filter canister. The Type 95 (1935) had a longer 6in canister with six reinforcing ribs. The Type 99 (1939) mask had a larger nose cup and an improved 4½in canister with nine reinforcing ribs. American gasmask canisters could be fitted to Japanese hoses and provided better protection from choking agents than the Japanese models. When the gasmask was worn the hose ran over the left shoulder and the canister was removed from the case and fastened to the case's shoulder strap by a tie-tape.

Early equipment was of relatively good manufacture using quality materials. From 1943 this began to change with the introduction of substitute and even shoddy materials, simplified designs, and manufacturing shortcuts. When Taro came ashore on Saipan after being rescued at sea (see below), like many of his comrades he had lost his weapons and equipment. He was no doubt disappointed with the replacement gear he received. Little use was made of leather, but rather his new belt, ammunition boxes, and bayonet frog were made of reddish or tan rubberized canvas and webbing. Buckles and straps were replaced with tie-tapes and fastening studs replaced by buttons and tabs. Cheap metal, plastic, and composite materials replaced brass, aluminum, and steel fittings. The workmanship was poor and much simplified. Canvas was thin and poorly woven. Much of the gear did not long survive the tropics and the rigors of field use. The rubberized canvas and web items, however, were better suited than leather for the tropics, lasting much longer.

## BARRACKS LIFE

To some degree Taro was better prepared for barracks life than soldiers of other nationalities. Conformity, subservience to authority, and close living conditions were part of his everyday life. Taro quickly learned that he was at the very bottom of the military hierarchy, and all above him, including recruits who arrived earlier, could inflict their wrath on him. He was reminded he was worth only *issen gorin* (one *sen*, five *rin* – less than a penny), the cost of a Red Paper postcard.<sup>5</sup> When more men were needed the Military Administration Bureau merely mailed more postcards. After all, a private 2nd class cost less than a good artillery horse.

Barracks hierarchy went beyond mere rank. Recruits themselves had their own divisions: recruits with over three months' service (first quarter inspection), those with over six months', further subdivided into those who had been promoted to private 1st class and those who had not, recalled reservists with different lengths of previous and current service, superior privates, and acting corporals. Those selected for NCO and officer candidate training had their own place in the hierarchy. Among recruits the older soldiers behaved as if they held more status than NCOs and officers – when the NCOs and officers were not present. The older soldiers forced recruits to clean their weapons and

<sup>5</sup> This was actually the cost of a postcard during the Russo-Japanese War, but the phrase remained in use.

### Soldiers' Holidays

The Japanese soldier was granted a number of holidays on which he did not work or train. Each of these days involved ceremonies and special meals, and half to two-thirds of the soldiers were allowed to leave post. Sunday was a day off from work and training as well.

Soldiers received no extended leave. In Japan they could visit home on holidays if it fell adjacent to a weekend. Families could visit their soldier relative at the garrison on holidays and Sundays.

The poster on the right commemorates Army Day: "Develop Asia" (Goro Tsuruta).

### Shinto and Imperial Court Holidays

*Shiuhohai* – New Year, January 1

*Gonshisai* – Imperial Court New Year ceremony, January 3

*Shinnen Enkai* – Imperial Court New Year party, January 5

*Kigensetsu* – Jinmu Emperor's coronation and the founding of the Empire, February 11

*Shunki Koreisai* – Spring ancestral memorial, Vernal Equinox (spring), March 20 or 21

*Jinmu Tenno Sai* – Anniversary of Jinmu Emperor's death, April 3

*Tencho Setsu* – Current Showa Emperor's birthday, April 29

*Shuki Koreisai* – Fall ancestral memorial, Autumnal Equinox (autumn), September 23 or 24

*Kannamesai* – Emperor's feast to the God Amaterasu Shrine, October 17

*Meijisetsu* – Meiji Emperor's commemoration, November 3

*Niinamesai* – Autumn festival to Imperial ancestors, November 23

*Taisho Tenno Sai* – Anniversary of Taisho Emperor's death, December 25

### Army Holidays

*Yasukuni Jinja Reitaisai* – Great feast of the Yasukuni Shrine, April 30

*Rikugun Hajime* – Opening day of the Imperial Army year, January 8\*

*Rikugun Kinenbi* – Army Day, anniversary of the 1905 Battle of Mukden, March 10

\*This was the beginning of the army training year and a grand parade was held.



equipment, polish shoes and leather gear, serve them meals, run errands, and often perform their minor work and clean-up assignments in the barracks. One's time in the service was an important status symbol; there was nothing else that gave more status, not even promotion. Service time was described as *menko*, a term originating during the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War, meaning the wooden tray on which food was served. It now meant the rice cooker's side-dish pan and defined the number of meals consumed in one's service. The number of *menko* were more important than the number of stars indicating rank on one's collar.

As a form of entertainment for the old hands, recruits would perform a ritual known as the *min min semi*. A recruit mimicked the cry of the cicadae (*semi*), protesting summer heat as he clung to an 8–10in (203–254mm) diameter barracks center support, his arms and legs wrapped around the varnished post. He might cry "*min min*" twice before sliding to the floor, no matter how hard he gripped the slick post. He immediately jumped up and repeated the act until completely sapped of strength.

The "flight of the warbler across the valley" (*uguisu-no tani-watari*) employed the long barracks tables placed end to end with a 3ft 3in (1m) gap between each. The recruit picked to play the warbler (*uguisu*) would duck under the table when ordered to "fly" and crawl as fast as he could on all fours to pop his head up in the "valley" between the tables. He would sing out "*ho ho-kekyo*" mimicking the warbler's spring song as



A typical barracks with its closely spaced bunks and the central tables on which soldiers maintained their weapons and equipment, studied, and ate. The rifle rack is seen to the right. A duty NCO ensures that all is in order, even while the troops sleep. Prior to the China Incident soldiers were issued more uniforms than later, with items becoming scarcer as the war wore on. Replacements for worn-out uniforms were simply not available to some units deployed on remote islands.

soldiers atop the tables pelted him with shoes, sticks, and manuals. "It was all in fun, a mean fun," reflected an old soldier, "but we all dreaded when it would be our turn."

These and other antics were no more than simple entertainment for the old hands at the recruits' expense, a simplistic hazing and initiation. Corporals and higher-ranking NCOs dealt out real punishments, regardless of the following prescriptions from the *Imperial Receipt*:

... Superiors should never treat their inferiors with contempt or arrogance. Except when official duty requires them to be strict and severe, superiors should treat their inferiors with consideration, making kindness their chief aim, so that all grades may unite in their service of the Emperor.

The most common abuse was the liberal use of the fist. On their first day the NCO in charge of the *han* lined the recruits up and ordered them to stand spread-legged for balance, remove their eyeglasses, and clamp their mouths shut. He then went down the line punching each in the face. This was often a daily ritual and might be repeated many times, both for poor performance as a unit or because of the errors of a single recruit. Bamboo swagger sticks, service belts, and even rifle butts were used. NCOs had a pair of "slippers" for off-duty wear around the barracks. This was a pair of worn-out marching shoes with the sides and uppers cut out to form an open slipper, but retaining its hobnails. With these offenders were slapped in the face, leaving scars. Taro and his comrades sported swollen, cut, and bruised faces. At meal times the NCO would select recruits to recite passages of the *Imperial Receipt* and those making mistakes in the formal court language were denied dinner, although the victim's friends might hide his share of the evening meal and give it to him after lights out. Such punishments were officially forbidden, but officers simply ignored such activities. "It was a game," said a former soldier. "We tried not to get caught, but the sergeants were always watching, and they would catch and punish us ... even when we had done nothing wrong. It was just the way of things."

#### Soldiers' Entertainment

What little free time soldiers were permitted generally found them restricted to the barracks. During this time the soldiers wore their work uniforms. Shoes and caps were removed upon entering the barracks. Common barracks games were mahjong, go, shoji (Japanese chess), and hanafuda (flower cards; pictured below). There were no organized sports other than Sumo, Judo, and Kendo practice. Authorities had banned baseball, previously a popular sport in Japan, when the war broke out. During festivals soldiers would perform traditional plays, and songs would be sung at dinner parties on special occasions. Special meals were served during the holidays.



**RIGHT** A garrison canteen. Here soldiers could purchase snacks, food and drinks, play games, and relax in their rare free time. Even here their conduct was monitored. Free time was seldom allowed and only for short periods.



**BELOW** A barracks steam bath. Crowded everyday living conditions prepared men for army life.



The recruits sometimes inflicted punishment of their own. One who caused problems for others, resulting in group-punishment, often suffered nocturnal beatings from his *han*. He had dishonored the *han* and caused a loss of face to the unit as a whole, as the *Imperial Receipt* once again made clear:

... you will finally grow selfish and sordid and sink to the last degree of baseness, so that neither loyalty nor value will avail to save you from the contempt of the world. It is not too much to say that you will thus fall into a life-long misfortune. If such an evil once makes its appearance among soldiers and sailors, it will certainly spread like an epidemic, and martial spirit and morale will instantly decline.

Some men broke under the strain and were discharged as unfit.

For minor official infractions the company commander dealt out punishment. Crimes might include minor insolence, being late for formations, damage to property, sleeping on duty, etc., and could mean one to three days' confinement in the unit detention room (*eiso*) behind the guardhouse on poor rations, and of course some unofficial beatings. For more serious crimes such as insubordination or threatening violence to an officer, and theft, gambling, and plundering, a soldier could be court-martialed and assigned to an army disciplinary unit (*rikugun kyokatai*) maintained in each divisional district. Confinement here was for up to two years. If the sentence was longer, the offender did his first two years in the disciplinary unit and then completed his time in a national prison.

Regardless of Taro's treatment he was fiercely loyal to his unit. The section was his family, the platoon and company an extended family, and the regiment his clan. The army world was an extension of traditional



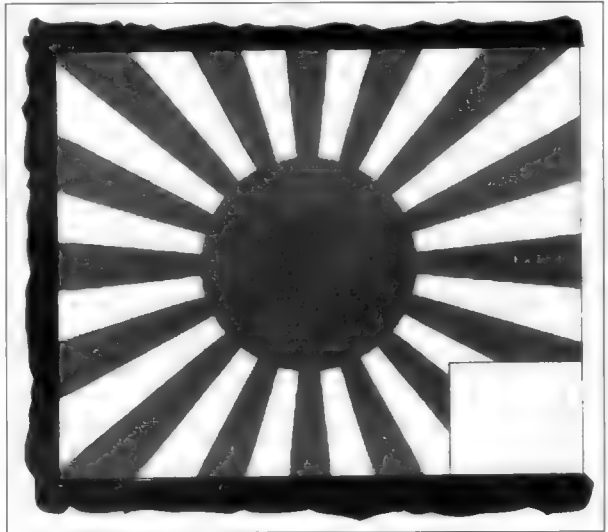
LEFT AND BELOW A unit on parade in the barracks quadrangle. The regimental color bearer, a lieutenant, was assigned on the table of organization and was not simply an additional duty. Infantry regimental colors depicted the 16-ray rising sun. It differed from the Naval Ensign on which the sun was off center, toward the staff. Unit colors had a purple fringe. The white patch in the lower right corner would bear the regimental designation in black characters.

Japanese society, conformity, and clan loyalty. This structure was further enhanced as Japanese units were recruited on a regional basis. Divisions, designated by numbers, were often informally known by the name of their home depot's prefecture. Many of the divisions and regiments existing at the beginning of the war had long histories dating from the 1870s or the turn of the century when they fought in the Russo-Japanese War. That war was a proud moment in Japanese history, the first war in which an Oriental country decisively defeated a European power.

Although some American accounts say the soldiers had no lunch, in actual fact three meals per day were served. Breakfast and dinner were eaten in the barracks. There were no mess halls. Meals were carried from the kitchen in covered pails by men sent from each *han*. In garrison Taro ate comparatively well, receiving up to twice as much food as his family at home. The daily Japanese diet revolved around a basic rice, fish, and vegetable combination. The army attempted to duplicate this diet and added some meat, extra vegetables, and sweets. The additions were not because soldiers were privileged, but necessary due to their physical exertion and to counter a lifetime's bland diet with insufficient protein and vitamins.

Contrary to popular belief, the Japanese soldier did not live entirely on rice and fish. To the Japanese rice was a staple food, just as bread is to Westerners, and constituted over 50 percent of the soldier's diet. A soup or stew side dish accompanied the rice as did pickles, different from Western varieties.

Polished (white) rice was more common than the more nutritious unpolished (brown) as it could be preserved longer. Bulk uncooked rice (*kome*) was shipped in woven rice-straw or burlap bags, as were wheat, barley, flour, salt, and sugar. Being relatively stout, the bags were used as sandbags once emptied. Pre-cooked compressed cakes of rice, barley,



Soldiers detailed from their sections march back to the barracks with their section's cooked meals in insulated containers. A strict accounting is being kept on the chalkboard. The duty NCO overseeing the detail is wearing a red and white weekly duty armband.



and wheat were packed in tins, sometimes mixed with red beans. White bread was also served.

The Japanese usually seasoned cooked rice (*gohan*) with soybean sauce (*shoyu*) or fermented soybean paste (*miso*). Japanese soy sauce is much saltier and “hotter” than that found in Oriental restaurants in Western countries. *Miso* was commonly used for preparing soups. Both *shoyu* and *miso* were issued in liquid and dehydrated form. Salt, vinegar, curry, ginger, and bean paste were other basic condiments.

Tea (*ocha*) was the preferred beverage and was served hot if at all possible. Canned rice beer (*biru*) and bottled rice wine (*saké*) were frequently issued. Cider was another popular beverage.

## BELIEF AND BELONGING

The Japanese soldier relied on two kinds of strength: the strength of individual will (*seishin*) and the national quest to expand the Empire, the Spirit of Yamato (*Yamato damashii*). “Bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof” – world hegemony or unity (*Hakko Ichi-u*) – was the ultimate goal. The destiny of the army, therefore, was the destiny of the Japanese Empire and the Emperor. A Japanese citizen was taught this in school and in the army. Whatever he did was justified, for he did it for the Emperor, a deity. From the *Imperial Receipt to Soldiers and Sailors*:

If you all do your duty, and being one with Us in spirit do your utmost for the protection of the state, Our people will long enjoy the blessings of peace, and the might and dignity of Our Empire will shine in the world.

Japan knew its resources were insufficient for a protracted war against the unified Western colonial powers. It would mobilize its limited resources and plunder the conquered territories, but the total mobilization of the national spirit (*kokuminseishin sodoin*) was what would win the war and allow the Empire to prevail against the enemies surrounding it on all sides. “One-hundred-million people, one mind” (*ichioku isshin*) was a popular slogan, though misleading as was much else – Japan’s population was 72 million.



**LEFT** In a unit kitchen meals are prepared for a festival. The rice, soup, and side-dish bowls are placed in large wooden trays for delivery to an auditorium where the celebration will take place.

Japan was both an agrarian and industrial society dominated by a warrior class. The *samurai* no longer existed, but their traditions and values did. The concept of *bushido* (way of the warrior) very much guided the armed forces. *Bushido* evolved between the 9th and 12th centuries, influenced by Zen, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism, the official state religion since the 1880s. It stressed a martial spirit, self-sacrifice, loyalty, justice, a sense of shame if dishonored, refined comportment, purity, modesty, frugality, and honor – honor being more important than life. However, there was no stipulation for these virtues to be granted to one's enemies.

The army placed complete faith in spiritual training (*seishin kyoiku*), its strength of will over the material superiority of its enemies. While Westerners tend to dismiss such intangibles, often owing to the Japanese's misplaced faith in it and resultant disasters, it was nonetheless a viable factor, within certain limitations. Belief in it was so strong, and the Japanese soldier so hardened to field conditions, that *seishin* can be attributed to many of the feats of endurance that astounded Western foes. Soldiers were expected to be tough and never demonstrate sensitivity or weakness in the face of adversity.

Regardless of the class system and the vast separation between officers and men, Japanese officers willingly shared the perils of combat with their troops. Officers literally led from the front with even senior officers directly engaged, more so than was common among their Western counterparts. Command posts were often located further forward than Western practice. Officers were expected to be physically and mentally tougher than their men.

Tactical doctrine focused on attack, surprise, rapid movements, commanders operating well forward, and relatively simple plans. Offensive actions were the norm. In the 1928 edition of *Tosui Koryo* (*Principles of Strategic Command*), the words defense, retreat, and surrender were expunged, as they were considered detrimental to morale and the martial spirit. The Japanese had an almost unreasonable abhorrence of defensive actions. If a Japanese officer were confronted



**ABOVE** Field kitchens issued hard crust bread and some soldiers carried a broad saw. The wooden handle is 7½in long and 1½in wide. The large blade is 5½in long and the smaller is 4½in. (Velmer Smith Collection)

with an unexpected, unusual or complicated situation in battle, he would find a way to attack – attack at unexpected times and points, along unanticipated routes and often with force ratios Western armies would not have attempted, all increasing the surprise factor.

Complete annihilation of the enemy (*teki*) was the primary goal; allowing the enemy to escape to fight again was unacceptable. This of course resulted in the surrender of large numbers of Allied prisoners who did not fight to the death as the Japanese did and who could not be as easily disposed of as the Chinese. The conquering of Western colonial territories meant large numbers of civilians were interned, a situation for which the Japanese were totally unprepared. The treatment of prisoners and internees varied greatly, with little guidance provided from higher command.

Self-sacrifice was expected of Taro. It was the *Imperial Receipt on Education*, issued in 1880, that established the perception of an absolute and divine Emperor, a “deity incarnate”, and that “... the climax of harmony is the sacrifice of the life of a subject for the Emperor.” The most perplexing aspect of the Japanese soldier to Westerners was his willingness to die in combat (*shiki*) for the Emperor. Shintoism elevated dying for the Emperor to a state of grace. This belief was not simply limited to officers or some elite, fanatical unit, but was common to virtually every soldier regardless of rank or position. The Field Service Code (*Senjinkun*) spelled this out: “In defense, always retain the spirit of the attack and maintain freedom of action. Never give up a position, but rather die.” This spirit was not just a simple statement in a regulation; it was the result of lifelong conditioning in a culture revering honor, loyalty, and obedience to superiors above all else. To surrender or even to be captured in what the West considered honorable conditions meant failure and dishonor to the Emperor, and this brought dishonor to the soldier’s family. As Captain Rikibei Inogichi explained:

We must give our lives to the Emperor and Country, this is an inborn feeling. We Japanese base our lives on obedience to the Emperor and Country. On the other hand, we wish for the best place in death, according to *Bushido*.

The Japanese martial spirit went beyond mere fighting to the death, it meant a willingness to sacrifice oneself in a fatal attack that might result in the death of only one enemy soldier and, if necessary, committing suicide to prevent capture. Ritual suicide (*seppuku*) (incorrectly called *hara-kiri* – belly-slitting) committed by officers failing in their mission was one thing, but for a private, with no superiors present, to willingly place his rifle’s muzzle to his head and push the trigger with a toe, or hold a grenade to his chest and pull the pin, is another thing entirely. There was no ritual about it; no one “made” him do it. Obligation was foremost in Japanese culture, and the soldier was obligated to die for the Emperor.

Mass suicide was also common. The *banzai* charge, ordered by a commander as a last resort, or a self-destructive *gyokysai* (breaking of the jewels) attack ordered by the Emperor, was a final hope of shattering the enemy’s will with the superior *seishin* of the Japanese soldier. Such futile attacks only hastened the inevitable end, however.

A. Private 2nd class infantryman



B. Light machine gun training

2



C. Individual clothing and equipment





D. Barracks life

E. Fighting "bandits", North China



F. South Seas individual and section equipment







Japanese soldiers were captured, however; often severely wounded or unconscious. Allied authorities reported Japanese prisoners through the International Red Cross, but Japanese authorities reported to their families that they had died in combat. The Japanese government actually paid death gratuities to the families of 40,000 men reported dead who were repatriated after the surrender. Once he found himself a prisoner, the soldier lost all sense of worth and honor. He had dishonored himself, his family, the army, the Empire, and the Emperor. He was no longer worthy, no longer alive. Viewed by the Allies as brutal, merciless, cunning, and capable of all forms of trickery, Japanese prisoners surprised their captors by their complete cooperation and willingness to provide intelligence.

What did Taro and his comrades think of the war? From the diary of an unidentified 144th Infantry Regiment soldier tasked to seize Guam: "Japan-America, War! It looks as though the hardships we have borne until now will be rewarded! We have received life from the Showa Reign. Men have no greater love than this. Now, prosper, Fatherland!"

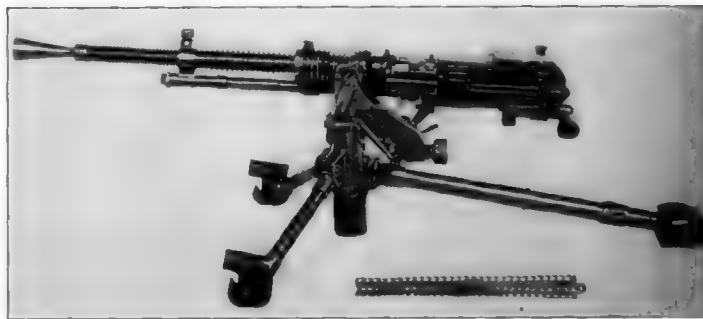


**Very small numbers of Japanese were taken prisoner. The Marine Corps captured only 4,500 prisoners while killing over 200,000. Here an off-frame Japanese-American interpreter questions a rare prisoner on Guam.**

## ON CAMPAIGN

Nito-hei Taro was conscripted in January 1943. His residence was in the Nagoya Divisional District and his father was a fishing-net manufacturer. (Nagoya is located south-west of Tokyo on central Honshū, largest of the Home Islands.) He undertook training in the 3rd Depot Division's 6th Infantry Replacement Training Regiment. After only three months' training he was shipped to North China with his replacement unit. They would not serve together as a unit, but would be assigned to different battalions within the 26th Division's 11th Independent Infantry Regiment. The 11th was one of several regiments, assigned to different divisions, which received replacements from the 6th Infantry Replacement Training Regiment whose personnel were conscripted in the Nagoya Regimental District. The 26th Division had been raised in 1939 and deployed to China that same year. It was unusual in that its assigned regiments were designated "independent." The division served in Shansi Province protecting coalmines and industrial facilities. The independent regiments' battalions had only three rifle companies rather than the usual four, lacked AT guns, and had fewer supporting weapons.

Taro was shipped aboard an army-operated troop transport from Hiroshima, one of the main ports of departure. The often-stormy passage across the Yellow Sea to Tientsin lasted only a few days, but was a miserable experience. Troop quarters were crowded with seasick soldiers. Board platforms were provided for sleeping, meals were irregular and usually cold, and latrines consisted of wooden stalls hung over the ship's side.



**A Nambu 7.7mm Type 1 (1941) heavy machine gun. This was an improved model of the similar Type 92 (1932), which differed in that its larger cooling fins went all the way to the foresight. Fed by 30-round strips, the weapons seldom overheated because of the robust cooling system and slow rate of fire: 450–500 rounds per minute. US machine guns fired at the same rate, but overheated more easily because of a less robust cooling system.**

Japanese infantry regiments (*rentai*) varied greatly in internal organization, but typically possessed three infantry battalions (*daitai* – designated I–III), a regimental gun company with six 7.5cm infantry guns, an AT company with six 3.7cm or 4.7cm guns, and a company-sized regimental train for transporting ammunition and supplies. Battalions generally had four rifle companies, although some had only

three. Rifle companies were numbered in sequence through the regiment (1–9 or 1–12). The battalion had a machine-gun company with eight or 12 7.7mm heavy machine guns (HMGs – *kikanju*), a gun platoon with two or four 7cm infantry guns, and a company-size train. Japanese units had a higher strength level at regimental and lower echelons than comparable US units, but their combat power, because of fewer crew-served weapons, was less.<sup>6</sup>

The 180-man rifle companies (*chutai*) had a 19-man headquarters with a captain or lieutenant commanding (*chutaicho*), a personnel warrant officer (equivalent to an executive or administrative officer), sergeant major in charge of personnel records (roughly equating to a first sergeant), supply sergeant, arms and equipment sergeant, four medical orderlies (often there was only one), an officer's orderly, bugler, and eight messengers. The three 54-man rifle platoons (*shotai*) had a two-man headquarters with a 2nd lieutenant platoon commander (*shokoricho*) and a liaison sergeant (*renrakukashi*). Roughly equating to a US platoon sergeant, the liaison sergeant's main combat duty was to ensure orders were relayed to the sections through arm signals and messengers. The three 13-man LMG sections were led by corporal section leaders (*buntaicho*), and consisted of eight riflemen and a four-man LMG crew (see Plate B). One rifleman usually carried a rifle-grenade launcher. Sections assigned to strengthened units had the addition of a two-man 5cm grenade discharger crew. The grenade discharger section was led by a corporal and had three two-man grenade discharger crews plus six riflemen, who also carried ammunition. The grenade discharger crews were armed with rifles. Smaller sections were common. In combat, when strength dwindled the grenade discharger section was usually absorbed into the LMG sections.

Most divisions possessed fewer than 200 trucks. Even German divisions, heavily reliant on horse transport, might have 500–600 trucks. Horsepower was a major facet in all units down to company level. Packhorses and one-horse, two-wheel carts hauled headquarters and communications equipment, aid stations, rations, horse forage, ammunition, and crew-served weapons. Most soldiers were involved to some degree in the care and rigging of packhorses, of which a regiment might have 600–800.

<sup>6</sup> A 1,100-man four-company Japanese infantry battalion had 37 LMGs, 36 5cm grenade dischargers, 12 HMGs, and two 7cm infantry guns. A 950-man three-company US Marine battalion had 81 automatic rifles (comparable to Japanese LMGs), 18 LMGs (comparable to Japanese HMGs), 18 watercooled HMGs, nine 60mm and four 81mm mortars, nine 2.36in bazookas, and 27 flamethrowers.



Army life saw the observance of frequent ceremonies. Here officers participate in a ceremony honoring warhorses lost in combat. Such traditions formed a bond within units and made recruits understand the sacrifices made by all who served before them.

## North China

To the warriors of the Yamato race, the Chinese were less than human, as equally despised as the Koreans; to the Chinese the invaders were Japanese devils (*Jihpen kuei-tzu*). This centuries-old hatred led to a medieval form of warfare, with mercy a sentiment unknown to both sides. Besides fighting the nationalist and communist armies, the Japanese had to deal with guerrillas. They were not viewed as armed combatants, but termed "bandits" (*hizoku*), the colloquial for guerrillas. Captured bandits were not considered prisoners of war, but outlaws.

Much of Taro's China service consisted of guard duty and patrols. Guard duty was an endless and boring task necessitating long hours of diligence. Guerrilla raids and sabotage, while infrequent, were always a threat. Taro, now a private 1st class (*itto-hei*), found that while discipline remained strict, so long as he remained awake on guard duty, was never late for formations, was suitably subservient to superiors, maintained his rifle and equipment, and made a show of working hard, China service was relatively easy – except for the mind-numbing boredom and exhausting marches through mud or dust. He had gone through a brief period of hazing from the veterans, but once he had participated in a patrol he was accepted as a member of the unit. NCOs were rough with the men and not above applying the fist or boot to a slow or negligent soldier, but such punishment was infrequent and usually deserved.

Typical punishments included repeatedly apologizing to a dropped piece of equipment

### Soldiers' Pay

By Western standards both officers and enlisted men of the Japanese Army received exceedingly low pay. From 1943 inflation and rising living costs resulted in soldiers receiving 80–100 percent additional pay over their basic rate depending on where they were serving. This was to ensure that they could make necessary local purchases and support their families. They had received a small overseas allowance before the war, but this was revoked when hostilities commenced. Certain technicians, bandmen, interpreters, etc. received extra pay.

Officers were paid during the last ten days of the month and enlisted men paid every ten days (10th, 20th, last day of the month). In peacetime, before going to the field, they received a ten-day advance. In December 1941 one yen (¥) was equivalent to US 23 cents or UK 1 shilling 2 pence. One hundred *sen* equaled one yen.

Sergeant major	32–75¥
Sergeant	23–30¥
Corporal	20¥
Lance corporal	13.50¥
Superior private	10.50¥
Private 1st class	9¥
Private 2nd class	6¥ (Class B), 9¥ (Class A)

Japanese money was issued in 1, 5, 10, and 100 yen notes and coins. *Sen* coins were 1, 5, 10, and 50. Owing to metal shortages, from 1944 *sen* notes were issued. Japanese military occupation money was issued in China, Manchuko, Philippines (pictured), Burma, Indochina, Dutch East Indies, and Commonwealth Pacific possessions. Their denominations were usually the same as previously used in the occupied country.



A Type 92 (1932) field telephone. Telephones were used extensively at all echelons for tactical communications. Little use was made of fragile, costly, and somewhat unreliable radios at small-unit levels. The Type 92 was of unexceptional design and none too rugged. The case is brown leather and the metal components are aluminum. (William L. Howard)



or standing at attention for hours in full equipment with the rifle on the right shoulder in the heat of the day, snow, or rain. A section or platoon might be punished for some group transgression by standing at attention in formation and endlessly singing *Hohei no Honryo* ("The Heart of the Infantry").

Acceptance by the unit came with a price on that first patrol. The platoon was marching down a back road before dawn to establish a checkpoint on a main road. The quiet shuffling of boots was the only sound when a startlingly loud rifle shot cracked out, immediately followed by the snap of the passing bullet. Corporals shouted and men scattered off the road, deploying as skirmishers as they had practiced. Lying in the weeds Taro could hear nothing except the hard breathing of the men next to him, their rifles aimed at the faint horizon. After a few minutes there were chuckles and remarks about bored bandits.

After more minutes of silence four scouts were sent toward the rising ground from where the shot had come. Time passed and a scout returned. Taro heard him tell the lieutenant there was a small hamlet over the low ridge. The shot had been a warning to alert the bandits obviously hiding there. The platoon moved fast. Three sections formed a horseshoe around the dozen mud and straw-thatched huts while one section under the liaison NCO barged into huts, rousting out the sleeping inhabitants. The surrounding of the cluster of shabby structures was conducted as a double-envelopment, an exercise they had practiced often. There was a great deal of shouting, women screaming, children crying, breaking pottery, and chickens squawking. Taro had expected a vicious firefight to break out in the bandit stronghold, but not a shot sounded.

The cordoning sections were called into the hamlet, leaving sentries posted on the outskirts, and men were spotted among the huts as others searched them. Terrified families huddled in the mud under a guard pointing a bayonet at them. Some soldiers occupied themselves collecting food and chickens. "We saw them only as creatures and not a care we gave of them," remarked a China veteran.

Taro and his comrade were overturning water barrels in which weapons and contraband may have been hidden when his section corporal pointed at him and motioned him to follow. Rounding the corner of a hut Taro found himself in the company of the lieutenant, liaison NCO, his section leader and another, a couple of lance corporals, and the two other newly assigned men. Three young Chinese men were

lying on their backs in the mud, their arms and bare feet bound. Two were wearing only breechcloths and one was clad in black peasant's clothes. All bore the signs of rifle butt blows on their terrified faces.

The liaison NCO, carrying a muddy Chinese-made Mauser rifle, fell in the three new soldiers. Standing at attention, the lieutenant simply ordered, "With bayonets, execute these bandits." Taro was later stunned when he realized he had not hesitated a moment. He simply followed orders as had been drilled into him over the brutal months of conditioning.

Faint crying could be heard from behind the platoon as they marched on toward the main road. No one said a word. At the evening meal the three new men received an extra share of fresh chicken with their rice.

Such was duty in China, for which servicemen received the colorful China Incident Medal (*Sina Jihen Jugun Kisho*).<sup>7</sup> Itto-hei Taro was awarded the red chevron of the Diligence Award (*Seikin Sho*) to sew on his upper right sleeve, which represented six months of good conduct and efficient service.

In the field the soldier carried one or two days' worth of tinned meat or fish rations and up to five days of rice ration. Sections often pooled their rations for collective cooking, but battalion field kitchens also provided meals. A containerized group ration with 40 meal portions was also provided. Its contents were packed in a tin container inside a wooden crate. Each portion contained: 10½oz polished rice, ½oz dehydrated *miso*, vitamin B paste, vitamin A and D tablets, and powdered tea (for vitamin C). Matches were included along with 20 3oz tins of heating alcohol; one tin was sufficient to heat two rice portions.

Foraging, or rather pillaging, was a common means of supplementing rations in China. Punitive patrols, dispatched as much for foraging as for tactical objectives, would loot peasants' gardens and homes, steal chickens and pigs, and hand-grenade ponds before wading in to pick up stunned fish. Comfort bags (*imon bukuro*) were provided from soldiers' aid associations. These might include soap, toothpaste, razorblades, cigarettes, matches, postcards, needles and thread, hard candy, tinned meats and vegetables, and a letter with good wishes. An unknown soldier reminisced, "Sometimes we talked of home or women, but mostly we talked about food."

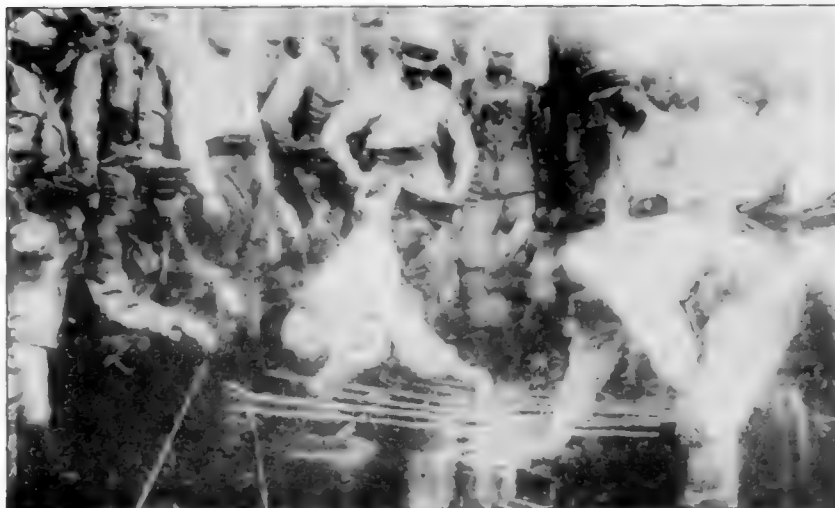
The issue of the Japanese armed forces' mass employment of comfort women (*jugun ianfu*) is controversial, with Japan making little effort to compensate victims or officially apologize. Up to 200,000 women were forced into institutionalized prostitution: Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, Indonesians, Burmese, and others. The concept of army-managed comfort stations is said to have originated in Shanghai in 1932 because of 223 reported rapes by Japanese soldiers. The system grew and was an established operation in all occupied areas. Young



**A Nambu 7.7mm Type 92 (1932) heavy machine gun crew searches for targets in China. An 11-man section manned heavy machine guns with either eight or 12 assigned to infantry battalion machine-gun companies.**

<sup>7</sup> The China Incident Medal was instituted on July 7, 1939 and awarded for China service from 1937 to 1945.

Sections often combined their rations and cooked in the field. Here rice cookers are tended over an open fire. The rice was cooked in a small number of mess kits and then distributed to all troops.



While soldiers mostly did their own cooking in the field, during active operations regimental field kitchens cooked rice, soup, and stew for issue to the troops for breakfast and dinner. For lunch they would produce rice balls. A field kitchen like this could operate on the move, being drawn by two horses.



women were recruited as entertainers, laundresses, or factory workers with promises of good pay. They were taken away from their home areas; Korean women, for example, were shipped to all corners of the occupied zones. They received only minimal pay – if any – little food, suffered poor living conditions, and were virtual prisoners servicing 20–30 soldiers a day. Specific hours were allotted for other ranks, NCOs, and officers. In some cases special comfort stations were established for officers. Many women were brutalized, murdered, or died of disease. Suicide was common. Contractors, to whom soldiers paid a minimal charge, operated the comfort stations rather than the army directly. Charges made were mostly profit for the operators, explaining the poor food and conditions the women suffered. Army doctors periodically

inspected the women and the troops were issued condoms, though some refused their use. “I am going to be dead soon,” some soldiers told the women, “I do not fear a disease.” Some women were allowed to return home when their one- or two-year contracts expired, but many were held until the war’s end. Few received any of the promised back pay and were fortunate to be given minimal travel expenses.

The Japanese soldier’s ability to march long distances at a rapid rate, and the use of bicycles by some units, caught the enemy by surprise. Soldiers traveled much lighter than their Western counterparts. The author once asked a veteran of the China Incident what of his service he remembered most vividly. Looking thoughtful he shrugged and said, “We marched and we marched. And it was always hot or cold.”

In the attack the company deployed from a march column and moved to a line of departure (*tenkaisen*) where it may or may not have occupied assembly areas (*kaishin*), depending on the degree of coordination and preparation time allowed. Seldom did leaders conduct reconnaissance or brief the troops: the aim was to attack as quickly as possible. Platoons crossed the

line of departure on order with two LMG sections forward traveling in files. The third LMG and grenade discharger sections followed. Moving in files eased control, presented a narrow target, and allowed rapid movement, especially through rough terrain and at night. When contact was made with the enemy the two lead sections swung outward, pivoting in the center to form a line. They would place heavy fire on the enemy position while the third section launched a flanking or enveloping attack to the left or right depending on enemy positions and terrain. The enveloping attack differed from the flanking attack in that it went deeper into the enemy's rear. The grenade discharger section remained behind the fixing sections and placed grenade fires on the enemy. It might also fire smoke rounds in an effort to blind the enemy. While the flanking/enveloping attack was doctrine at all echelons, it was more common for units to attack immediately from the front. The attack would close rapidly with little effort to maintain alignment. Grenades were thrown and the infantrymen rushed in with bayonets fixed.

The company would often advance with a single platoon in the lead, preceded a few hundred yards forward by a handful of scouts. When contact was made the lead platoon would fix the enemy with fire, possibly supported by HMGs, the battalion's main fire-support weapon. Of the two following platoons, one might move forward to join the fixing platoon while the other, or both following platoons, conducted a flanking or enveloping attack. If the enemy was weak, occupied a narrow front, or the terrain was favorable, a double-envelopment might be executed. Double envelopments were risky because of separating one's forces and the possibility of the enveloping elements firing into each other.

In October summer uniforms were turned in and wool uniforms issued, with an extra blanket, a pile-lined winter coat with fur-fringed hood and cuffs, and other cold-weather clothing. Campaigning largely came to a halt, but sniping and harassing ambushes were inflicted on



**Personal items from home, a comfort bag and a pair of rice-straw sandals. The sandal soles are rigid and the thongs are made of a soft material. Comfort bags (*imon bukuro*) were provided by soldiers' aid associations. (Velmer Smith Collection)**



**A unit pack column crosses a makeshift footbridge during the Philippines campaign. Pack mules and horses were used extensively in China and the Philippines. (Yoshinobu Sakakura)**



Facing an enemy with few heavy weapons allowed the Japanese to employ medieval-like stone and masonry forts in some areas in China. Here a Nambu 6.5mm Taisho Type 11 (1922) light machine gun is mounted atop a rice-bag platform. Its tripod can be seen between the rifleman's legs.

patrols and supply trains. There were few standup fights – as was guerrilla practice. The officers grew more frustrated and often found relief by selecting villagers to be executed in reprisal. All considered this a justifiable “punishment” of those who harbored and fed bandits.

December 1943 found an unexpected increase in communist guerilla activity. Two of the 11th Independent Infantry's battalions were dispatched further south than they had been before, along with a battalion of the 13th. Being a security division, the regiments possessed few packhorses; horses had to be borrowed from other battalions to move ammunition and supplies. Battalions from other divisions were involved in the “bandit suppression campaign.” The days were spent marching over rolling hills in long columns. Nights found them camped on hilltops around roaring bonfires with pickets posted on the hillsides. Villages were cordoned, searched, and looted. Bandit suspects were rounded up and marched along with the columns. Every third day the battalion rested. Most of the prisoners were sent to a local base, but some were kept to “initiate” replacements and recalled reservists. After all had been tested in this manner, the officers and senior NCOs still held some prisoners back to test their ever-thirsty swords.

Taro's battalion soon had its chance for action. A group of 30–40 bandits had attempted to ambush a supply train late one afternoon. Fortuitously, a following company crested a hill as the bandits initiated their ambush. Surprised, the would-be ambushers withdrew to a ridge to the south. Taro's battalion, to which the supply carts were heading, was bivouacked to the east on its rest day, and immediately moved to



An advancing heavy machine gun section manhandles its Nambu 7.7mm Type 92 (1932) gun using the detachable carrying handles fitted to the tripod. The complete gun weighed 122lb (55kg). (Saburo Miyamoto)

intercept the bandits. Moving west of the ridge's south side, the bandits collided with the battalion. Unable to escape to the east because of the pursuing company, nor foolish enough to strike north across the broad open plain, they scattered into an area of maze-like ravines bordering the river blocking their way south. After dark they would abandon their weapons and brave the river's ice floes.

The battalion encircled the area and, ascertaining the bandits' plan, began randomly lobbing infantry gun rounds into the ravines. HMGs were set up to cover the ravines' outlets along the river. Probes located the ravines' inland mouths and blocked them as platoons were moved into position. Hours passed, but finally two red flares fired from a grenade discharger signaled platoons and sections to begin sweeping down ravines. There was a high chance the advancing probes would run into one another, but that was a risk the battalion commander accepted. To wait until dawn meant the bandits would escape.

All armies endorsed the night attack, but few practiced it on a regular basis. Control and coordination were next to impossible. Once contact was made any semblance of control would fall apart, elements would become lost, intermingled, and casualties would be high, with many inflicted by friendly fire. The Japanese Army routinely accepted the risks and for them the night attack was common. They were used to small units operating independently; even daylight attacks were frequently uncoordinated, and a moderate casualty count was of little concern.

Taro's section moved down a ravine, their rifles with bayonets fixed in their right hands and their left hands gripping the belt of the man in front. Moving quietly at a crawl, even though rifle shots, sharp machine-gun bursts and the bang of grenades covered their movement, the dozen men wound their way down the ravine.

Without warning, rifles cracked from the right and the section machine gun ripped loose a long shattering burst. Rifles crackled and grenades detonated with blue-white flashes. Blinded by flashes, Taro rushed to the side of the ravine from which the rifles had fired. He clambered up the slippery snow-covered slope and kneeled. A black shape rushed at him. He fired once and slashed wildly with his bayonet. The body crashed into him, bowling him over – to save his life. A grenade detonated only meters in front of him, ringing his ears as fragments whined over his prone body. Another soldier flopped down beside him with a moan. Regardless, the man staggered to his feet and rushed forward. Taro was up and moving. More rifle shots and his comrade gagged and tumbled into a shallow ravine to their front. Taro slid across the snow into a prone position and fired his four remaining rounds into the ravine. He rolled on to his back, yanked open his left cartridge box, pulled out a clip, silently thanking the lieutenant for ordering them to remove their right gloves before advancing, rolled back, and stripped the rounds into his rifle. He fired once before hearing a thump to his left. Peering in that direction he saw sparks and then a blinding blue-white flash.

At dawn the aidman and lieutenant found him. Tiny grenade fragments had peppered his left shoulder, side, and leg. The lieutenant noted the six expended cartridges in the trampled snow, the bloodstained bayonet, and the bodies of three dead bandits, one lying bayoneted behind Taro and two shot in the ravine.



**The Wound Badges (*Gunjin Shoi Kisho*) were instituted on August 3, 1938. The gold 1st Class was for combat wounds and the silver 2nd Class for disabling non-combat injuries or illness. The badge was worn on the left breast pocket.**

In the line-of-communications hospital at Kalgan an officer presented Taro with the Wound Badge 1st Class (*Gunjin Shoi Kisho*) and a letter of merit from the battalion commander, a rare honor. It was seldom that a soldier received any formal recognition for valor. For a soldier to be awarded even the lowest decoration, the Order of the Golden Kite (*Kinshi Kunsho*),<sup>8</sup> was extraordinary. He was ordered to write a letter home informing his parents of his condition. After a couple of weeks he was loaded on a train and taken to a convalescent hospital in Shanghai. There, letters from his family finally reached him.

After recovering, Itto-hei Taro found himself reassigned to another unit, also supported by his home divisional district, the 18th Infantry Regiment, 29th

Division, stationed at Liaoyang, Manchuria. This was a newer division activated in August 1941 and soon sent to Manchuria as part of the Kwantung Army reserve undergoing "anti-Soviet" training. February 1944 found the 29th reorganizing as a sea operations division optimized to allow its regiments to operate more effectively on semi-detached operations on Pacific islands. (Allied intelligence referred to this structure as a "regimental combat team" organization.) Fillers were drawn from other units to bring it up to strength, its thousands of horses were turned in, the artillery and engineer regiments were broken up and their battalions and companies were reassigned directly to the infantry regiments. The motor transport and medical units were reduced and a sea transport regiment was assigned with organic landing barges. The 18th Infantry was more heavily armed than the other regiments, with even its own light tank company. It was a strike unit intended to conduct counter-landings or to reinforce the lighter 38th and 50th Infantry defending islands.

After a three-day train ride from Manchuria, the 29th Division was issued tropical uniforms and embarked aboard three transports at Pusan, Korea, on February 24. With the 18th Infantry aboard the *Sakito Maru* the Division sailed for the Mariana Islands far to the south. Indications were that the Americans would soon strike into the islands.

### **South Seas**

The trip to Saipan was an ordeal with overcrowding, short rations, no bathing water, and requiring round-the-clock wear of life vests and

<sup>8</sup> The Order of the Golden Kite (messenger bird of the gods, which hovered over a battlefield giving Emperor Jimmu Tenno a victory) was instituted in 1891. Enlisted men could receive only the 6th and 7th Classes for valor.

individual equipment. On February 29 the convoy bearing the 29th Division was two days out of Saipan, its first stop en route to Guam. Taro's company was standing watch that day. Companies rotated this duty, standing two-hour watches with all men lining the decks with all available binoculars.

Torpedoes suddenly slammed into the *Sakito Maru* and *Aki Maru*. The *Aki* was only damaged, but the *Sakito* was aflame and sinking. The USS *Trout* (SS-202) launched the attack, but was soon sunk by an escorting destroyer. Rope nets were dropped and the troops went over the sides. They drifted all night in the chilly water in life vests and on bamboo rafts intended to swim machine guns ashore. Captain Sakae Oba of the 18th Infantry (who surrendered his band of hold-outs in December 1945, a year and a half after Saipan fell) recalls hearing men singing army songs as he drifted through the night. Destroyers rescued 1,688 of the 18th Infantry's 3,080 men the next morning. The regimental commander was not among them.

Taken to Saipan, the regiment was partly rebuilt with transient personnel and others detached from various straggler units. Most of the regimental artillery and eight of its tanks were lost with the *Sakito*, as were most other weapons. Some men managed to retain rifles, belts, and bayonets as expected, but most were without and some had even shed shoes and uniforms.

Other units sent to Saipan suffered from submarine attacks and as a result there were some 4,000 unorganized stragglers, many without weapons and of little use to the defense. Time was not available to organize and equip these "useless troops" (*yuhei*). Some 600 18th Infantry survivors were organized into a new I Battalion under a captain and attached to the 43rd Division when it arrived in May. The remnants of the other two battalions were sent to Guam. 18th Infantry was positioned north of Tanapag Harbor on Saipan's east-central coast. The battalion's mission was to execute a counter-landing via landing barges behind the invading Americans on their own beachhead. Another mission would be to reinforce Tinian a few miles to the south if the Americans landed there first. The Japanese command expected the Americans to land either further to the south of or directly into Tanapag Harbor. Taro found himself promoted to superior private (*joto-hei*) and placed in charge of an understrength 2nd Company section, nine men armed only with rifles. The platoon had only a single LMG and a grenade discharger.

His platoon was assigned to a low rise overlooking the coast road. They dug one- and two-man foxholes (*kojinyo engo*) deep enough for



**A machine-gun crew manning a Nambu 6.5mm Type 96 (1936) light machine gun takes a rest break. The various tan canvas pouches and cases can be seen. The man in the right foreground has a 5cm grenade discharger in a canvas carrying bag resting on the ground. (Sentaro Iwata)**

The Japanese were adept at camouflage and deception measures. This is a dummy fighter constructed of bamboo on Yotan Airfield, Okinawa. Such deceptive measures increased as the war went on.



them to fight standing up. They called these “octopus traps” (*takotsubo*) after a hole dug above the low-tide line into which an octopus would crawl, only to be trapped when the tide went out. Camouflage was left to farm boys who had a natural eye for blending it into surrounding vegetation; city dwellers were hopelessly inept at the task. During the day they dug more holes, alternate positions in the hills, and watched American planes flying high overhead, dropping their bombs and seemingly immune to the few remaining antiaircraft guns. American ships on the horizon sailed back and forth belching puffs of black smoke. At night the soldiers went down to the shore and placed fresh camouflage on the hidden landing barges. The ships began coming at night too. The bombardment seldom ceased in the first two weeks of June. Food was adequate, although its delivery was erratic. During action when soldiers could not cook, the field kitchen supplied rice balls.

The field ration was 3lb (1.5kg), but in the South Pacific it was not standardized and varied from 2½lb to 3½lb per day. Two types of packaged field rations were issued in brown paper bags. The “A-ration” (3,140 calories) consisted of 2lb of rice and 5.3oz of tinned meat or fish. The “B-ration” (3,000 calories) consisted of 1½lb of hard biscuits (*kanpan*) in three meal-size paper bags and 2.1oz tinned meat or fish. Both were issued with a small amount of salt and caramel or hard candy. Vitamin B supplement was provided in tablet, liquid, or paste form (in a squeeze tube).

Rations were supplemented with locally procured foods such as sweet potatoes, bananas, coconuts, taro, and papayas. On Saipan sugarcane and a fermented palm wine (*yashizake*) could be had from the Japanese colonists. Goats, pigs, dogs, and fish supplemented issue rations. Island garrisons were encouraged to plant vegetable gardens.

Two types of specially packaged combat rations were available. The “compressed ration for one-day” (*asssku koryo*) was wrapped in heavy brown crepe paper with the folds secured by glue. It measured 3¼ × 3¼ × 1½in and weighed 9oz. Its “main dish” was six rectangular cakes of compressed wheat or barley, four cakes of sugar, three brown cakes of dried fish, and one or two pink cakes of salted dried plums. The



**Blasted by bombs and machine guns, 30ft (9m) long Kohatsu landing barges lay swamped along a beach. Besides Imperial Navy landing craft, the Imperial Army Shipping Engineer units operated their own landing barges.**

cakes could be eaten as they were or crumbled into water and cooked as a hot cereal.

The other combat ration was the “rice flour and side-dish ration” packed in a cellophane package secured by tie-strings on both ends. It was about 8in long and 3½in wide, and was sufficient for two emergency meals. It was also used to supplement the rice ration or other foods. It held four small brown paper bags each containing two dried mixed fish-and-vegetable cakes (“side-dishes”) and two bags of pre-cooked rice flour. Two bags of cakes were crumbled and mixed with one bag of flour and a small amount of water. It was mixed into a dough-like paste and eaten cold. There was also a paper-wrapped “confection bar” of limited issue for emergency use. It weighed 1½oz and was made of flour, sugar, tea, milk, eggs, and butter.

After days of incessant aerial and naval bombardment, the American tidal wave struck on June 15. One defender described the US invasion fleet as “bigger than the entire Imperial Navy.” Scores of amphibian tractors rolled ashore, which the Japanese called “Alligators.”<sup>9</sup> “They came across the beaches like locusts, spouting flames and we could not stop them.” The 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions carved out a large beachhead on D-Day on the lower east coast, well south of Taro’s position. It was impossible to move during the day with airplanes constantly overhead. Naval gunfire sometimes fell in the 18th Infantry’s area, but these were usually short bursts mostly striking in the hills behind them.

On June 17 in the early morning hours a regimental-sized counterattack was launched supported by 44 tanks. This was to be the largest tank battle in the Pacific. The counterattack struck the 2d Marine Division on the beachhead’s north flank. The results were devastating – to the Japanese. Over 300 soldiers died and 31 tanks were destroyed. That same day the Japanese Army Chief of Staff, Hideki Tojo, sent a message meant to reinforce the Saipan garrison’s spirit: “Because the

<sup>9</sup> “Alligator” (*A-Ri-Ge-Ta*) was used in the generic sense, as only the early LVT-1 was called the Alligator. Only LVT-3s and 4s were used at Saipan.

Radio operator students learning the Japanese equivalent to Morse Code. Even comparatively short-range radios used code rather than voice. The Japanese used the *Kana* or *Katakana* phonetic alphabet, a system of 50 characters for each of the sounds of the Japanese language.



fate of the Japanese Empire depends on the result of your operation, inspire the spirit of the officers and men and to the very end continue to destroy the enemy gallantly and persistently and thus alleviate the anxiety of our Emperor." The Division chief of staff responded, "Have received your honorable Imperial words and we are grateful for the boundless magnanimity of Imperial favor. By becoming the bulwark of the Pacific with 10,000 deaths we hope to requite the Imperial favor."

Rumors spread that the Combined Fleet was on its way to destroy the Americans and work was being rushed on an airstrip on the island's north end, as reinforcements would be flown in. Some men mentioned that no Japanese aircraft were seen battling the Americans. They were told to clear such doubts from their heads. On the afternoon of the 17th orders were received for 18th Infantry to launch its planned counter-landing on the American beaches and attack them from the rear. They would rush ashore with grenades and demolition charges to attack artillery, command posts, and ammunition dumps. There was no coordinated plan of action: simply rush from the barge and attack. No mention was made of what they would do after that, nor was mention made of a simultaneous counterattack from inland (these were planned, but communications were so poor that orders were not received and only a few small attacks occurred). Every man was issued four grenades. Four men carried special demolition charges, four Type 99 (1939) magnetic antitank charges lashed between two small planks. Besides their normal 120 rounds of rifle ammunition, men filled their pockets and haversacks with clips. Canteens were filled, two palm leaf-wrapped rice balls, a tin of meat, and confection bars were issued. Every man had to have a bayonet and these were collected from those staying behind. Their backpacks were stacked in a ravine, the 2nd Company's assembly area behind the beach. Taro doubted he would see the few oilpaper-wrapped letters from his family he left in his pack. Removing the camouflage from their ramped *Daisatsu* (49ft/15m, 100–120 troops) and rampless *Kohatsu* (30ft/9m, 40 troops) barges, they donned kapok life vests, and boarded with bayonets fixed.

At 0400 hours on June 18, 35 barges sortied and turned south toward the Marine beaches. At 0430 the American landing craft, infantry

gunboats (LCI[G]) patrolling the coast detected the barges off Flores Point north of Tanapag Harbor. Star shells lit up the night and red streams of 20mm and 40mm tracers hammered into the barges. The barges' 7.7mm machine guns spewing out pink and pale-blue tracers seemed a weak response. Marine 105mm shells soon began bursting among the scattering barges.

Beaching near Tanapag, the troops staggered from the riddled barges carrying the many wounded. Details were ordered back to remove the dead, who were cremated in a dawn bonfire. Other men made some effort to camouflage the 22 remaining barges. Before long American fighters strafed the beach, destroying many of the craft.

With only just over 350 effectives remaining, the next night I/18 was ordered to a limestone hill 3,280ft (1,000m) east of Garapan, the island's administrative center and largest town. The sprawling tin-roofed concrete and wood buildings had long been leveled.

Taro's unscathed section was assigned a log-and-earth pillbox on the hill's east side, a gradual slope covered with trees and scattered brush. They were given an old 6.5mm Type 11 LMG and 600 rounds of clipped cartridges in cartons. Taro assigned a soldier who had been a second gunner to man it, along with another to assist him. The platoon commander had the other men dig one-man "octopus traps" 32–64ft (10–20m) from the pillbox on both sides and to the rear. They made lifting camouflage covers to hide them in the brush, protecting the pillbox's flanks and forming a fire net (*kamo*) in front of the LMG position (*keikikanjuza*). With their bayonets they cut lower twigs from bushes to four-hands above the ground. As the Americans approached they would not realize they were walking into a *kamo* and the defenders could see the enemy's boots. The section was given a large sack of rice, three cases of tinned meat, and a few tins of pickled plums. They never saw the lieutenant again.

Days passed. Shells plowed the surrounding area. Many times fighters roared over with machine guns blazing. Firing to the south



The interior of a machine-gun pillbox. Stoutly constructed of palm or hardwood logs, they were quite resistant to artillery fire, mainly owing to the several feet of earth heaped on the sides and tops. It usually required direct assault to neutralize them. The conditions were cramped and stifling inside and often unsanitary.

Camouflage garments were locally produced in the Solomon Islands and packed in bales for forward shipment. They were made of a shaggy, reddish-brown fiber that grows at the base of the fronds of coconut palms. Sheets of this fiber were sewn together as a rainproof and camouflage garment. When used for camouflage it and the helmet net would be additionally embellished with local vegetation. Japanese fishermen and farmers in the Home Islands made similar garments from palm fibers and reeds or rushes.



never ceased, and grew closer each day. At night men went out with all the canteens looking for water and food. The never-ending American parachute flares to the south lighted their way. Taro never asked permission to send them; there was no one to ask. They returned with water and sometimes rice balls or kelp-wrapped hardtack to report from defenders on the hill's west side that the Americans had halted on the edge of ruined Garapan. The sounds of fighting continued to come closer from the south and east. One day a corporal came by leaving a sack of barley cakes and tins of crabmeat and tangerines. He told them to dig a shallow pit in front of their embrasure to trap rolling grenades and falling debris from shelling so it would not block the port. During the day Taro kept a man forward as a warning sentry (*tansho*). At night he sent a two-man sentry (*nininsho*) forward.

Firing increased to the front just after dawn on July 2. A small hill (known to the Americans as Flametree Hill) to their south was shrouded in explosions and dust through the morning. Artillery began randomly falling on their hill. It intensified in the early afternoon and the barrages became more concentrated, falling on clumps of trees with some landing just behind Taro's position. Men said the Americans did not "fight with drawn sword" (*hakuheisen*), but hid behind their artillery barrages.<sup>10</sup>



Surrendering Japanese troops in Korea are searched by an American soldier, an extremely humiliating experience. They wear summer uniforms with small unit insignia over the right breast pocket. For a Japanese soldier, being a prisoner was the ultimate disgrace and they considered themselves dead in regards to their family.

They were not forewarned by the *tansho* when the Americans came. The smoke and dust drifting through the brush restricted their view. Mortar rounds suddenly thumped around them. The machine gunner whispered that he saw movement to the right and traversed the gun. One of the riflemen to the right fired from his hole. An American machine gun immediately answered. Rifles crackled and fell silent. More movement to the front and the gunner fired a short burst. Taro gripped his arm, telling him to wait. More rifle shots sounded to the right, then the left. The gunner aimed in that direction. Seeing brown boots beneath the clipped brush, Taro ordered him to fire. He finished the hopper in three bursts. The American machine gun began firing long bursts, joined by automatic rifles. A grenade bounced to the right of the embrasure and began spewing dense white smoke, blinding them. The gunner emptied the reloaded hopper in a single long burst and the sharp cracks of Japanese rifles were heard on both sides. Fragmentation grenades detonated as the smoke grenade burned out. The No. 2 gunner was frantically slapping clips into the hopper when rifles and automatics began kicking up limestone in front of the embrasure. Orange-red flames gushed through the opening. The last sensation Taro felt was that of inhaling burning gasoline.<sup>11</sup>

## EPILOGUE

The Japanese officer corps may have inherited the *bushido* code of the *samurai*, and while soldiers might be comparable to the peasants of the past within army hierarchy, they too were expected to accept the notions of *bushido*. All Japanese soldiers were trusted to give their lives for the Emperor (*tennoheika no tame ni shinukoto*). There was no greater honor than to die in combat, not only defending the Empire, but also aggressively expanding the Empire.

<sup>11</sup> The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines account of the fall of Sugarloaf Hill simply said, "Against fairly heavy machine-gun fire, the battalion swept to the top of the hill, mopped-up the Japanese defenders and by 1700 established contact with the 6th Marines on the right." (Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*)



**TOP LEFT** An unequalled willingness to die for the Emperor (*tennoheika no tame ni shinukoto*) saw no reluctance among Japanese soldiers to sacrifice themselves routinely to kill the enemy. Here a soldier dies in a hole dug in the middle of a dirt road. He would have slammed the modified 33lb (15kg) Type 96 (1936) fragmentation bomb into the belly of a tank as it drove over him. The appearance of the ground indicates that an airburst artillery round probably killed him.



**TOP RIGHT** The spirits of the war dead (*eirei*) are contained in white-shrouded boxes (*shiraki no hako*), in the form of ashes, but more frequently they were empty. All of this was part of a culture of sacrifice that the soldier embraced.

A rising sun flag was flown over the home of men called to the colors. When one sacrificed his life, a black streamer was added to the flag. In theory the remains of a fallen soldier were returned to his family in a white-shrouded box (*shiraki no hako*), in the form of ashes, the "spirit of the war dead" (*eirei*). In reality the dead were cremated en masse on the battlefield and ashes scooped at random into the boxes, the soldier returned united with his fallen comrades. The soldier's identity tag or a final letter written by him may have been included as "relics of the fallen." No remains or relics, of course, were returned from Pacific islands. The family received only the small wooden box – empty. The victorious Americans merely bulldozed the dead into pits or left them buried in caves and blasted pillboxes. Many soldiers sent a fingernail or hair clipping home before a battle or left these with his family when departing.

The family received a payment of 30 yen for each year the fallen soldier had served and a prorated amount for a partial year. The family would also receive the Soldier's Bereaved Family Medal (*Gunbjin Izoku Kisho*), a small silver medallion bearing the Imperial Chrysanthemum suspended from a looped cross-shaped dark purple cord tassel.

Atop a hill near the Imperial Palace is the *Yasukuni Jinja*, the memorial to the war dead. It houses the spirits of 2.5 million war dead dating back to 1853. Originally enshrining the spirits of those who died overthrowing the *Shogunate* and aiding in the restoration of the Emperor, it was created in 1869 as a symbol of national unity. This shrine has been wreathed in controversy since the end of World War II, as some interpret it as glorifying the misdeeds of the China Incident and Greater East Asia War. Among the enshrined spirits are those of executed war criminals, including Hideki Tojo.

It is believed that once a soldier is enshrined at *Yasukuni* (peaceful country) he becomes a national deity (*kami*), protecting the Empire as he did when he died fighting. Soldiers believed the highest honor was to die for the Empire and Emperor, followed by enshrinement in *Yasukuni*. Soldiers going into battle would sometimes shout to one another "See you at *Yasukun!*" believing they would meet again as comrades in death.

Japan had 6,095,000 men in her army and navy at peak strength. She suffered approximately 2,566,000 armed forces dead of all causes including non-combat deaths (1,506,000 killed in action), plus some 810,000 missing and prisoners of war. Civilian dead numbered 672,000.

## MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

Located on the grounds of the *Yasukuni Jinja* is the controversial *Kushaukan War Memorial Museum*, open since 1882. It houses significant displays of uniforms, insignia, decorations, weapons, equipment, tanks, and vehicles from the Greater East Asia War and earlier. Numerous small military museums with some World War II displays are found on Japanese Self-Defense Force installations. One of the better of these is the Ordnance Museum at Tsuchiura, Kanto, with numerous tanks, artillery, and other weapons on display. Probably the best Japanese World War II collection is at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra; Australian military unit museums offer smaller collections. US military museums, especially divisional museums of those that served in the Pacific Theater, have small displays of Japanese items, as do combat arm and service branch museums. Probably the largest US display of Japanese material is the US Military Academy Museum at West Point, New York. On the West Coast the Oregon Military Museum at Camp Withycombe, Clackamas, has a significant Japanese arms and equipment collection.

### Useful Websites

*Yasukuni Jinja*:

<http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/>

Australian War Memorial:

<http://www.awm.gov.au/>

West Point Museum:

<http://www.usma.edu/Museum/>

Oregon Military Museum:

<http://17thdivision.tripod.com/knackersquaddiesquartermastersection/id37.html>

Japanese Army Home Page:

<http://member.nifty.ne.jp/takixxx/>

**"Paying Homage to the Nation's War Dead," Yasukuni Shrine, a wartime scene. (M. Terauchi)**



**LEFT The Yasukuni Jinja today. The banner displays the Imperial Chrysanthemum. Some eight million visitors pass through each year.**

## GLOSSARY

<b>akagami</b>	Red Paper (conscription notice)	<b>kekikanju</b>	light machine gun
<b>buntai</b>	section	<b>kenju</b>	pistol
<b>chutai</b>	company	<b>kikanju</b>	heavy machine gun
<b>Dai Nippon Teikoku Rikugun (Kogun)</b>	Imperial Japanese Army	<b>kojin sobi</b>	personal equipment
<b>Dai Toa Kyoei-Ken</b>	Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere	<b>koshita</b>	underdrawers
<b>Dai Toa Senso Senkum</b>	Greater East Asia War	<b>makikyahan</b>	puttees
<b>daitai</b>	battalion	<b>mofu</b>	blanket
<b>danyakugo</b>	cartridge box	<b>ninshikihyo</b>	identity tag
<b>enpi</b>	shovel	<b>obigawa</b>	service belt
<b>gait</b>	overcoat	<b>rentai</b>	regiment
<b>genekihei</b>	active service	<b>ryakubo</b>	field cap
<b>geta</b>	sandals	<b>seishin</b>	individual spirit and will
<b>guni</b>	tunic	<b>sen'ninbari</b>	belt of a thousand stitches
<b>gunko</b>	trousers	<b>Senjinkun</b>	Field Service Code
<b>guntai techo</b>	soldier's pay record	<b>senyu</b>	comrade
<b>haino</b>	backpack	<b>seoibukuro</b>	tube pack
<b>han</b>	unit	<b>shidan</b>	division
<b>hangou</b>	rice cooker (mess kit)	<b>Shina Jihen</b>	China Incident
<b>hei</b>	soldier	<b>shin-gunto</b>	sword
<b>henjoka</b>	marching shoes	<b>shoju</b>	rifle
<b>hiko</b>	gasmask	<b>shotai</b>	platoon
<b>Hinomaru</b>	rising sun flag	<b>shuryudan</b>	hand grenade
<b>hokobukuro</b>	ditty bag	<b>suito</b>	canteen
<b>hotai</b>	field dressing	<b>tabi</b>	canvas shoes
<b>juban</b>	undershirt	<b>Taiheiyō Senso</b>	Pacific War
<b>juken</b>	bayonet	<b>tekidanki</b>	rifle grenade launcher
<b>jutekidanto</b>	grenade discharger ("knee mortar")	<b>tekidanto</b>	grenade discharger ("knee mortar")
<b>kashi-kan</b>	non-commissioned officer	<b>tenmaku</b>	shelter-half
		<b>tetsubo</b>	steel helmet
		<b>tokugyo hei</b>	specialist soldier
		<b>zatsuno</b>	haversack

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## COLOR PLATE COMMENTARY

### A: PRIVATE 2ND CLASS INFANTRYMAN

Nito-hei Taro no doubt felt both proud and strange in his new uniform and equipment (1). He wears the Type 98 (1938) wool winter uniform with the Type 92 (1932) helmet, Meiji Type 30 (1897) leather equipment, and is armed with a 6.5mm Meiji Type 38 (1905) rifle. The back view (2) shows his backpack, blanket bedroll with the shelter-half rolled on top, haversack over his right hip, canteen atop it, broken-down shovel, Meiji Type 30 (1897) bayonet, Type 99 (1939) gasmask case, and reserve ammunition box.

3a Steel helmet with cloth cover displaying the means of securing the tie-tape.

3b The helmet's suspension system.

4a Shovel demonstrating the method of securing the blade to the handle with a rope.

4b Shovel and handle stowed in the carrying case (reverse side).

5a Type 95 (1935) gasmask.

5b Type 99 (1939) gasmask.

5c Type 99 gasmask case with cleaning cloth, anti-freeze bottle, and anti-fog disks.

5d Decontamination powder.

6 Marching shoes displaying the heel cleat and hobnails.

7 Puttees.

8 Old-type backpack with leather straps.

9 Tube pack.

10 Shelter-half with two-piece pole and tent stakes.

### B: LIGHT MACHINE GUN TRAINING

The section's LMG had a four-man crew, although it was often manned by three. The crew were armed with pistols, but in practice they more likely carried rifles. There were some problems with LMGs. Their rapid extraction sometimes caused stoppages. To overcome this the Type 96 (1936) LMG required that its cartridges be oiled before loading in the magazine, which was accomplished by an oiler built into the magazine loader. A special reduced-charge round was issued. Standard load 6.5mm rifle rounds could be used, but with an increased chance of stoppage. The 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) was an improved Type 96. The gunner (2) carried only one 30-round magazine in a case plus the tools and spare

parts case. The second gunner (1) carried two magazines in a carrier, the magazine loader, and an ammunition bag with 150 rounds. The third gunner (3) carried two ammunition bags and the spare barrel. The crew leader (not pictured) carried the telescope sight in a leather case.

LMGs had been at the core of Japanese small-unit tactics since 1922. They based LMG application on the French concept of a single LMG being assigned to each section, and in fact called the sub-unit an LMG section rather than rifle section, emphasizing that the weapon provided the section's base of fire. The portable shield could be penetrated by rifle fire at close range, but provided some protection at over 328ft (100m). The shields were seldom used, however, because of their weight and bulk.

### C: INDIVIDUAL CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

Each soldier was issued a white cotton work uniform (1). Although white trousers were issued, the work tunic was often worn with olive-drab trousers as well as with the standard field cap. Here the Havelock neck protector flaps are being worn. These were held on to the cap by a hook on the inside of the flaps fitted in matching thread loops around the outside of the cap band. The wool service tunic (2) was lined with white cotton and marked with the model designation (Type 98), soldier's name, official approval, and manufacturer's mark. The inside of the collar was often lined with triangular bandage material to prevent chafing. The large inside pocket is for the soldier's Pay Record Book (2a) and the smaller for the field dressing (2b) and triangular bandage (2c). The cotton service trousers (3) display the unusual waist tie-tape.

A low-cost backpack (4) was issued in 1938 to accommodate the China Incident mobilization. Rather than straps to secure the bedroll, O-rings were fitted for simple tie-cords. One of the most common backpacks (5) was issued in 1941 with a tangle of tie-tapes and used through the war.

The rifleman's equipment (6a) included the service belt, two 30-round cartridge boxes (6b), a 60-round reserve cartridge box in the center with oil bottle (6c), and bayonet frog. The identity tag (7) for an infantry enlisted man, reading from top to bottom: first character of the individual's arm of service (*Ho* = Infantry), one or more characters for the regimental designation number (11th), a small tick mark separating the regimental designation from the individual's number, and his regimental serial number (824). Officers' tags indicated the arm or service, rank, tick mark, and family name.

Items carried in the pack included an undershirt and underdrawers (8a), two pairs of socks, with one used to carry rice in the haversack (8b), ditty bag with sewing kit, shoe brush, soap box, scissors and toothbrush (8c), wool/cotton blanket (8d), *tabi* split-toed shoes (8e), and commemorative hand towel (8f).

Haversacks varied in design details – this was an early war issue (9) marked "Taro". Typical items carried in the haversack



Two 8mm pistols were issued. The upper is the better-known Nambu Taisho Type 14 (1925) pistol and the lower is the more widely issued Type 94 (1934). (Velmer Smith Collection)

included a spare sock filled with rice, chopsticks, utility knife, soup spoon, tinned meat ration, cracker (hardtack) package, Bakelite side-dish bowl, alcohol cooking fuel, and ditty bag.

The early type 1-pint (0.5l) canteen (leather-covered or bare metal) was still in limited use (10a). The 2½-pint (1.2l) Type 94 canteen was standard issue (10b). The elaborate four-piece rice cooker (11) consisted of (top to bottom) cover tray, side-dish, soup pot, and rice pot.

## D: BARRACKS LIFE

Two- or three-story wooden or masonry barracks had a long room lined on both sides with closely spaced bunks, each provided with a straw-filled mattress, sheet, sawdust-filled tubular pillow, blanket, and a quilt in the winter. A narrow shelf ran along the wall on which were stacked folded clothing and a box for small items. Footwear was stowed under the bunk. At one end of the room was a shelf for buckets and cleaning supplies and beneath it hung brooms, brushes, and mops. Long wooden tables were placed end to end down the aisle with benches on either side. Rifle racks were positioned to divide section areas. It was on the tables that the soldiers cleaned weapons and equipment, studied, and ate. Latrines and baths were in separate buildings. Soldiers washed their own clothes, but unit tailors and cobblers were available for repairs. Unit garrisons were on the outskirts of towns and sometimes located within cities. Soldiers spent what little spare time they had studying and maintaining their equipment. There were moments of amusement though. Here Nito-hei Taro performs the *min min semi* ritual while his *han* enjoys a special treat of bottled cider, tinned mandarin oranges, cherries, and pickles received from a soldiers' aid association.

## E: FIGHTING "BANDITS", NORTH CHINA

Japan's basic policy in China was "burn all, destroy all, kill all," at least in regards to the "bandit extermination" campaigns. "Bandits," regardless of their actual status, were outlaws and their capture usually led to their execution. As in every other area occupied by Japan, Japanese forces strived to exploit China's resources.

To deal with the freezing conditions of North China, Manchuria, and Korea, the Japanese soldier was well supplied with cold weather clothing and equipment. The fur-lined winter coat was provided with detachable sleeves, allowing it to be worn in milder conditions, but also allowed the wearer more freedom of movement in combat. Lined wool trousers were provided as well as wool knit undershirts, three-finger mittens, and winter shoes, felt boots, and fur-lined felt puttees. Fur-lined canteen and rice cooker covers were also issued, the latter because pre-cooked food was carried in the cooker and this prevented its freezing. In China Joto-hei Taro (1) was issued a 7.7mm Type 99 (1939) rifle, much more effective than the 6.5mm rifle with which he trained. Taro carries his gear in a tube pack while his corporal section leader (2) uses the 1941 backpack. Officers carried different equipment. His platoon commander (4) carries a Nambu 8mm Taisho Type 14 (1925) pistol, officer's canteen,

**A water purification system used to fill canteens. Besides this portable system, divisional water purification and supply units were provided with heavier equipment enabling soldiers to purify large quantities of water. Individual water needs were calculated at 8½-13 pints (4-6l) per day for drinking and cooking.**

binoculars, dispatch case, and a Type 94 (1934) sword, soon to be tested. The evidence of the bandit's (3) illicit activities lay on the ground in the form of two Chinese 23rd Year (1933) Model hand grenades.

## F: SOUTH SEAS INDIVIDUAL AND SECTION EQUIPMENT

Japan had long issued lightweight tropical clothing for use in the Mandated territory of the South Seas, but it was the Pacific War that saw widespread issue of new tropical uniforms and equipment items, as well as increased use of substitute materials.

- 1 The cotton tropical tunic, made in several variants, was similar in design to the Type 98 tunic, but with an open collar, underarm vent flaps, and no lining material. Taro wears a cotton undershirt beneath the tunic, which was often worn as an outer garment. Rank insignia was worn on the collars, but it was also common to wear a rank badge over a pocket. Several versions of the cloth-covered cork tropical helmet were available. Officers' helmets had a white cover.
- 2 Both long and short tropical trousers were issued. The short version reached to below the knees and was still intended to be worn with cotton puttees. Actual shorts with a short-sleeve shirt were also issued. Tropical uniforms were issued in both green and tan shades.
- 3 This Type 92 steel helmet is fitted with a camouflage net and its chin tie-tapes are tied in a simplified manner.
- 4 A pickax with a detachable head was issued to some infantrymen.
- 5 Each company was provided with a number of wire cutters, which were insulated to allow them to cut electrical wire.
- 6 Small sickles were provided to clear fields of fire and cut camouflage materials.
- 7 This late war service belt, front cartridge boxes, reserve cartridge box, and bayonet frog are made of light tan rubberized canvas. Another rubberized material had a light reddish smooth surface.
- 8 Type 94 canteens were issued with a simplified cap-retaining cord.
- 9 A less complex rice cooker consisted of only three pieces.





**LEFT** Two examples of the many different types of officer's leather dispatch cases. The larger one is  $2\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{2} \times 10$  in and the smaller is  $2 \times 6\frac{1}{2} \times 9$  in. A US Marine veteran glued the rank insignia and flag on the smaller case. (Velmer Smith Collection)

**BELOW** Japanese troops and nurses surrender to the 77th Infantry Division on Cebu, Philippine Islands, after Victory Over Japan Day. In the months following the war, hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops were repatriated. They received no warm welcome at home, except perhaps from their immediate family.



- 10 Late war marching shoes with rubber soles and capped toes.
- 11 Homemade rice-straw sandals.
- 12 Puttees with shorter tie-tapes were secured around the top rather than in the "X" pattern. An elastic auxiliary puttee covers the top of the shoe to keep debris out. These were sometimes worn on the wrists to seal tunic sleeves and keep insects out.
- 13 Rising sun flag with best wishes and names of friends and family.
- 14 This "belt of a thousand stitches" is a pre-printed (in red) band sold commercially to which family's and friends' stitches were added.

### G: THE END ON SAIPAN

Fighting to the death in a Saipan pillbox, Taro and his men operate a Nambu 6.5mm Taisho Type 11 (1922) LMG. Japanese pillboxes were stoutly constructed, often of resilient palm logs covered by thick layers of earth. The Japanese ability to blend them into the surrounding terrain and vegetation made them difficult to detect and engage. Protection from grenades and hand-delivered demolitions was paramount and might include overhead cover, a small embrasure, a ditch to catch rolling grenades, an angular entrance trench, an interior wall to block blast, and a narrow sump dug in the floor into which a grenade could be kicked. Regardless of the protective measures taken, any pillbox could be defeated by direct tank and bazooka fire, and flamethrowers.

### H: SOUTH SEAS AID STATION

On paper, Japanese infantry units possessed adequate medical staff, but in reality they were often severely undermanned. This captain surgeon may have been one of only two assigned to a regiment, which was authorized to have 11. The medical system was geared to traditional linear warfare with short-duration engagements. It proved woefully inadequate in the Pacific, with massive, continuous casualties inflicted by unprecedented American firepower and tropical illnesses. Many medications were found to be virtually without effect and far under strength. Heavy use was made of drugs for injection, issued in fragile glass ampoules without standardized packaging. Many of the drugs used had long been discarded in European and American medical practices. Great stock was held in vitamins for treating illnesses and wound recuperation, and they were even included in aidmen's medical kits. With no means of refrigeration to store whole blood, direct transfusion was necessary. Blood plasma, not requiring refrigeration, was not available. Medical instruments were nickel-plated carbon steel rather than stainless steel.

While the Japanese were notorious for firing on Allied medical personnel, forcing them to shed their Geneva crosses, Japan formally adopted the internationally recognized red cross in 1886 as a "non-religious" symbol identifying medical personnel and facilities.

When the end came on beleaguered islands the wounded were often given grenades, were individually shot, or simply abandoned.

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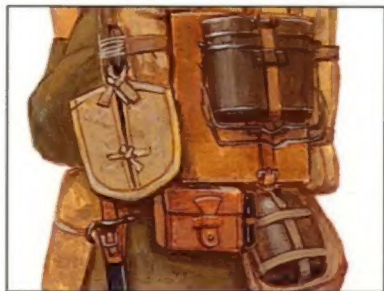
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Insights into the daily lives of history's fighting men and women, past and present, detailing their motivation, training, tactics, weaponry and experiences



Full color artwork



Clothing and equipment



Photographs

## Japanese Infantryman 1937–45

### Sword of the Empire

This book examines in detail the Japanese infantryman who, despite comparisons with the notorious German Waffen SS, was an enigma to Westerners. Brutal in its treatment of prisoners as well as the inhabitants of the areas that it conquered, the Imperial Japanese Army also had exacting standards for its own men – strict codes of honor compelled Japanese soldiers to fight to the death against the more technologically advanced Allies. Identifying the ways in which the Japanese soldier differed from his Western counterpart, the author explores concepts such as *bushido*, *seppuku*, *shiki* and *Hakko Ichi-u* in order to understand what motivated Japanese warriors.

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